

Learning to Resolve Interpersonal Conflicts more Efficiently through Transformational Leadership: A Study on Coaching

Pauliina Airaksinen-Aminoff

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Abstract

“It is in your hands, to make a better world for all who live in it.”

- Nelson Mandela -

All leaders must deal with interpersonal conflicts and know how to resolve them (Kets De Vries 2017; Bass & Riggio 2006). It has also been argued that ever more interpersonal conflicts will inevitably occur due to the transformation of business models, mergers and acquisitions, organizational turnarounds, and digitalization and robotics (De Wit & Meyer 2010; Todnem By 2005). These changes have already impacted leadership, making it more complex than ever before (Avolio, Sosik, Kahai & Baker 2014; Uhl-Bien, Riggio, Lowe & Carsten 2014).

Scholars generally agree that it is critical to resolve interpersonal conflicts as they arise as such conflicts lower group cohesion and decrease followers' effectiveness, motivation and well-being (Tekleab, Quigley & Tesluk 2009; Di Carlo & Ranalli 2008; De Dreu & Weingart 2003). However, leaders often seem to avoid intervening in and resolving interpersonal conflicts because they find them unpleasant and intervention time consuming (Saeed, Almas, Anis-ul-Haq & Niazi 2014; Jehn 1997; Wall & Callister 1995).

This study builds on Bass's (1990; 1999) theory of transformational leadership and the previous literature on interpersonal conflicts (e.g. Deutsch 1990; Jehn 1997). The study investigates how leaders orient themselves when they encounter interpersonal conflicts, asking how leaders negotiate engagement and avoidance when called upon to resolve and manage interpersonal conflicts and how they can be supported in their conflict-management efforts through coaching.

In order to better understand the complexity of intervening in interpersonal conflicts, and the effects of coaching, this study investigates three leaders, focusing on their leadership styles, their current approaches to solving interpersonal conflicts and the impacts of coaching on these approaches. These three leaders, who the author of this study observed and coached for

lengths of time varying from three months to two years, greatly differ in terms of their leadership styles, their approaches to resolving interpersonal conflicts and the industries in which they work in (new technology, energy and media).

Methodologically, this empirical study represents action research. This has allowed the author to assume the roles of both coach and researcher; in action research, the researcher is actively engaged in solving problems and developing the business or organization and in producing beneficial information for daily operations, which can also lead to the researcher's own profound transformation (Brydon-Miller, Greenwood & Maguire 2003). The empirical data collected during this study consist of 1) notes of observations of meetings, events, workshops and seminars in the organizations over a period of two three years, 2) recorded personal interviews (audio and video), 3) emails with the three leaders, and 4) notes of the coaching sessions, which totalled over 1 000 hours.

Based on the research findings, the study argues that transformational leadership, as delineated by Bass (1990; 1999), is an unattainable goal for most leaders. Nonetheless, a transformational leadership style can be taught and learned. However, to change one's behaviour, for instance in order to perform a more transformational style or to resolve interpersonal conflicts, requires more time than the ten weeks mentioned by some scholars (Grant 2016; Kets De Vries & Korotov 2007).

The findings of this dissertation have various implications for leadership education and support. 1) Leaders would benefit from peer support, as it facilitates the development of their skills and self-esteem, thereby allowing them to better intervene in and resolve interpersonal conflicts. 2) Leadership education should focus more on interpersonal conflict resolution and intervention. 3) Teaching should be pragmatic in nature, including concrete advice on verbal communication and other specific techniques.

Companies would benefit highly from leaders who understand the reasons behind interpersonal conflicts because such understanding can prevent these conflicts from occurring. Moreover, the ability to notice conflicts as soon as they arise is also helpful in resolving them. In addition, companies would benefit from leaders with positive self-esteem, as such leaders possess the courage to confront such challenging situations as interpersonal conflicts.

Key words: Leadership / Transformational leadership / Interpersonal Conflict / Conflict management / Coaching

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“Our mother might take up to half a day to write two lines. So, you no longer have to worry if your writing takes time”, said my daughter to comfort her friend while they were doing homework. This certainly sums up all of my research: time was not only demanded for observing my coachees, but also for thinking, processing and internalizing things, for writing, and my own transformation. In addition, even more time would probably have been needed for writing down all that I have experienced and, above all, learned and internalized, because the last three years have been all that: learning a new way of thinking, applying what has been learned, constantly challenging myself, accessing a whole new world of academia, and truly getting to know my coachees, building trust and learning from them.

When I began this project in the spring of 2015, my passion was to learn more about leadership, increase my skills and readiness to act and serve as a coach and support my coachees more professionally by benefiting from people wiser than myself and delivering this newly-gathered knowledge to my clients. At that point, I could not even imagine how much this research process would teach me: the sharp edges of how I see leadership have been sanded down, and I now see deeper cause-and-effect relationships in leaders’ decisions or failures to make decisions. I understand the real challenges of leadership even better than when I was acting as a leader in large corporations; nothing is self-evident in leadership, except for the aspiration to treat everybody respectfully and well. In addition, interpersonal conflicts have always fascinated me, due the fact that I have a very solution-oriented approach to life, and leadership: why do disputes remain unresolved? I was burning to explore this problem, and now I understand how interpersonal conflicts can act as great teachers if we so desire.

In addition, new kinds of people entered my life – people who I would not have met without this research process. These marvellous human beings will affect the rest of my life, making it happier and richer. My greatest lesson in this work has, in addition to my own transformation, been learning from other people – all of you who have influenced this study and enabled and helped me to complete this research – and learning leniency.

Miraculously, my late mother has also played a great role in this, as while research includes endorphin-filled moments of success, above all it requires experiences of failure and feelings of being unable to survive those failures. In such moments, I heard my mother say “yes you can”, reminding me that no one can succeed alone, but together anything is possible. My father challenged me, as a child, to succeed in my studies. This did not necessarily feel encouraging to the young person I was, but it made me exceed my limits. I am grateful to you too forcing me to surpass myself. Therefore, I would like to thank you all for the immense amount of invaluable help, which I was given.

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Helsinki October 7th, 2018

Forever grateful and happy,

Pauliina Airaksinen-Aminoff

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1. Introduction

This chapter presents the key approaches, research gap, purpose and research question, and structure of this study.

1.1 Leadership Challenge

Conflicts occur everywhere, in every organization and in every day of our lives; in fact, “conflict make[s] us into who we really are”, because conflict plays a significant role in the growth of human character and in relationships (Muldoon 1996, p. 9). Interpersonal conflicts are part of a leader’s work; thus, leaders must be able to deal with such conflicts and be prepared to resolve them (Bass 1990; Burns 1978). Nevertheless, despite the fact that interpersonal conflicts occur so frequently, leaders often avoid intervening or involving themselves in them because they find it unpleasant and time consuming (Jehn 1997; Stone 1995). What is more, there is lack of knowledge of how to resolve interpersonal conflict situations as a leader. Thus, leaders need support and education for resolving conflicts (Saeed et al. 2014; Coleman, Deutsch & Marcus 2014; Kets De Vries et al. 2010; Tekleab et al. 2009; Bass 1999). If conflicts are not resolved, they may decrease team effectiveness and negatively affect organizational performance by debilitating employees (Hjerto & Kuvaas 2017; Saeed et al. 2014; Tekleab et al. 2009; Doucet, Poitras & Chênevert 2009; De Dreu & Weingart 2003).

A broad range of academic articles can be found on leadership, conflict management, and coaching, and, in addition, a large body of practitioner literature exists (Dinh, Lord, Gardner, Meuser, Liden & Hu 2014; Jehn 1997; Wall & Callister 1995; Bass 1990). In the *Leadership Quarterly Journal* (LQ) alone, over 800 articles have been published over the past 25 years on leadership (Dionne, Gupta, Lee, Shirreffs, Serban, Hao, Dong Ha & Yammarino 2014). Furthermore, conflict literature has abounded since ancient times, as Coleman, Deutsch and Marcus (2014) and Wall and Callister (1995) note.

Despite the vast body of literature on leadership and conflict research, intervening and resolving interpersonal conflicts is nevertheless

challenging, as stated above (Saeed et al. 2014; Kets De Vries et al. 2010). Thus, one may ask what can be done to encourage leaders to intervene in interpersonal conflict situations and learn more about these situations. Kotter (1990) calls for education and learning, which should be part of a leader's everyday life, and in answer to Kotter's demand, the use of coaching in organizations has increased greatly since the 1990s (Berglas 2002; Feldman & Lankau 2005). Moreover the amount of literature, both academic, and practitioner, has grown. However, the key question remains how leaders can be coached to better learn to intervene in interpersonal conflict situations and what kind of leadership styles would most effectively support interpersonal conflict resolution.

Several studies have proved transformational leadership to be the most effective leadership style in terms of organizational well-being and behaviour and managing conflicts (Saeed et al. 2014; Zhang, Cao & Tjosvold 2011; Dionne et al. 2014; Atwater & Bass 1994; Bass 1990). Transformational leadership has also been proven to be effective despite the culture (Jung, Scott, Davies, Bower, Whalley, McNally & Mannion 2009). Consequently, transformational leadership has become the dominant focus area of leadership research in recent decades (Carter & Greer 2013; Jin, Seo & Shapiro 2015; Cho & Dansereau 2010). It is one of the most cited leadership theories of the past 30 years and is considered to be linked to team performance and creativity (Lehmann-Willenbrock, Meinecke, Rowold & Kauffeld 2015; To, Tse & Ashkanasy 2015; Judge & Piccolo 2004), and beneficial effectiveness (Tims, Bakker & Xanthopoulou 2011; Cho & Dansereau 2010; Walter & Bruch 2010; Boerner, Eisenbeiss & Griesser 2007; Bass & Riggio 2006; Bass 1990).

It thus seems that leaders would benefit from learning and performing a more transformational leadership style. However, is this even possible? According to Dóci and Hofmans (2015, p. 436), most leaders are partly capable of performing a transformational leadership style when "given the right conditions", i.e. in the absence of overly stressful situations or excessively demanding tasks. These scholars conducted a laboratory experiment to test transformational leadership behaviour. They found that the more confusing the task was, the weaker the transformational behaviour by the leader of the group became.

Transformational leadership occurs when "leaders broaden and elevate the interests of their employees, when they generate awareness and acceptance of the purpose and mission of the group, and when they stir employees to look beyond their own self-interest for the good of the group" (Bass 1990, p. 21). Transformational leadership theory is part of the full-range leadership model, which includes both non-active and active leadership styles (Bass & Riggio 2006; Northouse 2016). If the full-range leadership-model were a lineal description or spectrum of leadership styles from non-leadership, such as *laissez-faire*, to active leadership styles, such as transformational leadership, non-leadership styles would be at the left end of the spectrum, and transformational leadership styles would be at the right end (Northouse 2016; Bass & Riggio 2006; Bass 1990). In this study the

leadership styles performed by the observed leaders are related to full-range model of leadership.

Transformational leadership includes four components, known as Bass's four I's, which describe the essence of the transformational leadership style (Bass & Riggio 2006; Kirkbride 2006, p. 246; Bass & Steidlmeier 1999; Bass 1985):

1. **Individualized consideration:** A leader is truly concerned about her followers' well-being and interested in their development (Northouse 2016; Bass 1999).
2. **Intellectual stimulation:** A leader encourages her followers to be creative to find new angles for resolving problems (Uusi-Kaakkuri 2017; Northouse 2016; Bass 1999).
3. **Inspirational motivation:** A leader intends to motivate and inspire all her followers (Northouse 2016; Bass 1999).
4. **Idealized influence:** A leader has high ethical and moral standards, and she is trusted and respected as a role model (Northouse 2016; Bass 1999). I describe Bass's four I's in more detail in Section 2.1.1.

Leadership is a "process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal" (Northouse 2016, p. 6). By process, Northouse means that a transaction will occur between leaders and their followers. In this transaction, both the leader and the follower can influence each other: rather than only the leader providing advice and opinions, followers can also offer their points of view for the leader to consider. Moreover, according to Northouse, no individual trait or characteristic can be identified that would be solely responsible for leaders' impact on their followers. Northouse's (2016) point of view is in line with Burns' definition of leadership, where leadership is seen as a joint performance: "Leadership is the reciprocal process of mobilizing by persons with certain motives and values, various economic, political, and other resources, in a context of competition and conflict, in order to realize goals independently or mutually held by both leaders and followers" (Burns 1978, p. 425).

This study is based on the transformational leadership approach because – according to several studies and scholars – interpersonal conflict situations are most effectively resolved by a leader who adopts a transformational leadership style (Saeed et al. 2014; Doucet et al. 2009). Moreover, it also seems essential to base coaching on transformational leadership, and its four components, in order to be able to support and influence coachees in their process of transforming into more self-reflecting individuals, developing their self-knowledge and performance as transformational leaders, becoming better people (Grant 2016; Northouse 2013; Bass & Riggio 2006; Avolio et al. 2004) and, most of all, learning to intervene in interpersonal conflict situations.

According to Feldman and Lankau (2005), the effects of coaching leaders are incontestable: Leaders' behaviour will change, their self-awareness

will increase, and several types of learning will occur. In addition, leaders' performance as leaders will increase.

Despite the sensitivity of allowing someone to closely follow one's own life, coaching provides the opportunity to create a close, trusted relationship with a leader and enables the coach to act as a supportive and helping peer companion (Ely, Boyce, Hernez-Boome, Nelson, Zaccaro & Whyman 2010; Bowles, Babcock & Lai 2007). Coaching has been researched from the perspectives of effective behaviours in organizations, and the elements characteristic of expert coaches, but it has not been studied from the standpoint of transformational leadership (Pharion 2014).

Due to the sensitivity of this subject, the research method I use is action research. Action research by nature allows an observer, in this case me, the coach, to participate in the research process and influence the outcomes. Therefore, I am strongly involved in the research process as an active participant, as I am the one who is coaching three different leaders from three diverse industries. Consequently, my performance affects the coaching results (Brydon-Miller et al. 2003; Adelman 1993).

I have worked as a coach for the past seven years, coaching top leaders and middle managers from various industries. During this research period, I conducted 62 interviews with 47 interviewees, – management team members, including my coachees, and employees alike – in order to gain a wider understanding of the issues connected to leadership styles and interpersonal conflicts in the organizations concerned. These interviews were conducted in three companies: a start-up, a middle-sized energy company and a large international media corporation. The three leaders were chosen according to the cases they presented. Adam, who represents the media industry, had challenges motivating his followers, although the reason for their lack of motivation turned out to be interpersonal conflicts. Ben, who represents the energy industry, was more aware of the core problem, which was interpersonal conflict and thought he would resolve it better by enhancing his communication skills. Finally, Cecil, from a company representing a new technology industry, had a specific interpersonal conflict situation with the majority owner of the company. These three leaders also differed from each other in terms of their personal characteristics and leadership styles.

Theoretical background of this study

The main key concept in this study is transformational leadership, based mainly on Burns' (1978) and Bass's (1990) transformational leadership theory, developed later by Bass and Avolio (1994) and Bass and Riggio (2006). Later in the study I place the transformational leadership approach within the context of other leadership styles to broaden understanding of the concept.

Interpersonal conflict, as defined by Coleman et al. (2014), and Jehn (1997), is another key concept in this study. Leaders deal with interpersonal

conflicts on a daily basis, and according to De Dreu and Weingart (2003), and Jehn (1995), interpersonal conflicts (also termed relationship conflicts) are the most destructive type of conflict for an organization, as they paralyze the workers. Scholars like Saeed et al. (2014) and Doucet et al. (2009) note that transformational leaders are best able to foster the functioning of a team and that they tend to have the most positive approach to conflict management (Saeed et al. 2014). Thus, conflict management is a valuable mechanism for understanding the impact of a transformational leadership style on team performance (Zhang et al. 2011).

Doucet et al. (2009) conducted an empirical study in a hospital environment. The authors attempted to identify the correlations between workplace conflicts (divided into two categories: cognitive and relational, also termed interpersonal conflicts), and different leadership styles, including transformational, transactional and laissez-faire styles. Their study proves that a transformational leadership style reduces conflicts more than transactional and laissez-faire styles.

Coaching is the third key concept of this study. Coaching has been increasing among top management, and, according to the existing literature, coaching methodologies have developed from a management-performance-centric perspective into an approach which focuses on both organizational performance and well-being (Grant 2016; McKee, Tilin & Mason. 2009).

This study relies on these premises: each of the three leaders who I observed, coached and interviewed aimed to enhance organizational well-being (Grant, Curtayne & Burton 2009). However, this study also investigates why leaders avoid resolving interpersonal conflicts and how they could learn to resolve them.

Why then did I choose learning to resolve interpersonal conflicts as research topic? During my past thirty years in various positions as a leader and follower, I have noticed that budgeting, creating strategies or sales and marketing have not been the most intractable problems for a leader to resolve; instead, resolving interpersonal conflicts have always seemed to be the most challenging task for every leader.

1.2 Research Gap

Though a vast amount of research exists on leadership, conflict and coaching, research on the effects of transformational leadership, particularly in regard to interpersonal conflict resolution, is limited, i.e. the literature fails to explain explicitly how to reduce conflicts.

Saeed et al. (2014) describe transformational leaders who resolve interpersonal conflicts in constructive ways as having significant social skills. Nevertheless, Saeed et al. (2014) fail to detail how these leaders use their skills or what these social skills include. However, they mention that leaders should “adapt their conflict management behaviours to a given situation” (Saeed et al. 2014, p. 215). In an earlier study, Atwater and Bass

(1994) presented a general idea of transformational leadership and its influence on team factors, including conflict management. According to Atwater and Bass (1994), a transformational leader, by supporting a culture of discussion among team members, prevents interpersonal conflicts from occurring. The leader acts as a role model for her followers, resolving conflicts by intellectual influence: “The intellectually stimulating leader moves the parties toward a solution that integrates the efforts of parties in conflict into a collaborative solution” Bass and Riggio (2006, p. 69). In turn, Doucet et al. (2009) and Zhang et al. (2011) claim a transformational leadership style reduces conflicts more than other full-range-leadership-model styles such as transactional and laissez-faire styles. However, they fail to specify how.

Thus, there is still a lack of research on the concrete ways a leader should intellectually influence the conflict situation, what kind of words to use, how to intervene concretely, negotiate and behave, and how to get a leader to act.

On the other hand, many studies exist on conflict management and the causes of conflicts (Coleman et al. 2014; Jones & Brinkert 2008; Wall & Callister 1995; Deutsch 1990). Moreover, Raider, Coleman and Gerson (2000) have presented a Resolution Continuum on how to mediate conflicts step by step and how to teach conflict resolution skills in workshops. In addition, several studies focus on negotiating and acting as a mediator (Coleman et al. 2014; Coleman & Lim 2001). Furthermore, Jones and Brinkert (2008) have written a book on how to concretely approach interpersonal conflicts and how to support the resolution of conflict situations by coaching. Despite these studies, however, there is remarkably little normative leadership research on how a leader should learn resolve interpersonal conflicts concretely by coaching.

It is noteworthy that the articles, books and studies on leadership primarily focus on identifying different types of leadership styles and describing how leaders behave and perform to gain better results in terms of both organizational well-being and financial returns (Northouse 2016; Dóci & Hofmans 2015). Instead, studies on how leaders could implement the findings of this literature in their leadership performance, i.e. what leaders should do to improve their performance, or how leaders should use different styles of leadership in various situations, is scarce (Northouse 2016; Bass & Riggio 2006).

It is notable that abundant research is available on how a leader can resolve interpersonal conflict situations in theory (Wall and & Callister 1995; Jehn 1994), while limited research exists on concrete solutions. One exception to this is Hendel, Fish and Galon (2005), who studied the relationship between nursing managers’ leadership styles and techniques for handling conflicts in practice. The authors discovered that “transformational leadership had great significance [when] choosing the strategy . . . to resolve conflicts” (Hendel et al. 2005, p. 137). Hendel et al. found that the most favourable strategy for resolving conflicts was competing, which was followed by compromising and accommodating. However, the authors failed to report what these nurses

actually said. Consequently, Lehmann-Willenbrock et al. (2015) attempted to identify the type of communication used by a transformational leader that most positively influences the team. The authors concluded that solution-focused communication exerted the most significant influence on problem-solving processes. Lehmann-Willenbrock et al. claim that transformational leaders' communicate without criticism or complaints.

Nevertheless, if the results are so positive, why do so few leaders adopt a transformational leadership style? In their research, Dóci and Hofmans (2015) found that the complexity of tasks at the workplace decreased leaders' ability to act in a transformational way due to their lack of psychological resources. The authors created a manipulative situation where students, divided into groups, needed to make a decision in three tasks: renting office space, choosing a new product and hiring a new manager. Several options were given to these groups, and the levels of complexity were manipulated. The number of options were either increased or decreased. The study found that the more complex the tasks became, the more the leader began to control and monitor her resources to avoid losing them (Dóci & Hofmans 2015, p. 14). The authors argue that "as the task complexity grows the leader's psychological resources will get depleted by the strenuous cognitive demands of the task, and the leader will no longer be able to engage in highly complex, resource-building transformational behaviours e.g. coaching subordinates, inspiring them to think innovatively, providing them with a vision" (Dóci & Hofmans 2015, p. 9). It would thus seem as if there is a connection between leaders' psychological competences and their ability to intervene in complex situations such as interpersonal conflicts. This then raises the question of whether intervening be learned and developed.

There is a reasonable amount of research on how a leader should resolve and manage interpersonal conflicts (Coleman et al. 2014; Saeed et al. 2014; Wall & Callister 1995) but limited research on how to teach and educate a leader to be more capable of intervening and managing interpersonal conflict situations. In addition, an endless number of studies exist on coaching athletes in specific areas, but no studies can be found that connect transformational leadership and coaching (Pharion 2014).

Consequently, it would be important to explore how to help leaders learn to adopt a more transformational leadership role in their work, and how leaders could be taught to use a transformational approach when resolving interpersonal conflicts. In addition, it would also be valuable to gain insights into whether leaders avoid intervening in interpersonal conflict situations, and, if they do, what the reasons are for their inability to intervene.

1.3 Purpose and Research Question

Some of the key reasons for my interest in interpersonal conflicts and coaching have come from my work in various organizations, which has taught me that the most challenging and demanding issues are not budgeting,

purchases, organizational charts or tasks, but intervening in interpersonal conflicts and resolving them, as I also noted earlier. As mentioned, recent studies have focused on leadership styles in conflict management, and conflict-management styles in general, which strengthen the team and help team members solve the conflict more efficiently (Tekleab et al. 2009; Wall & Callister 1995). Scholarly discussion about leaders not resolving conflicts and how an unsolved situation might even be beneficial is also well-known (Tekleab et al. 2009; Jehn 1997). However, less research has been conducted on why leaders often try to avoid resolving conflicts and on how to help leaders learn to resolve such conflicts and act in these situations (Jit, Sharma & Kawatra 2016; Saeed et al. 2014; Zhang et al. 2011).

This study investigates the impacts of transformational leadership-based coaching on leaders' ability to learn to resolve interpersonal conflicts more efficiently. To contribute to the existing literature, which will be presented in Chapter 2, and to challenge some of the current approaches in leadership, interpersonal conflict resolution and coaching, this study will answer the following research question and sub-questions:

1. How do leaders negotiate and act upon the implications of transformational leadership-based coaching and its potential for resolving interpersonal conflicts?
 - 1.a. How do leaders orient themselves in the face of interpersonal conflicts? How do they negotiate engagement and avoidance?
 - 1.b. How could a leader's orientations in resolving interpersonal conflicts be supported through coaching?

In addition, this study focuses on interpersonal conflicts within organizations, i.e. on the conflicts that occurred in the three case-study organizations between leaders and their followers or between two followers. Despite the different categorizations of conflicts, such as intergroup conflicts (i.e. between two or more groups), intrapersonal conflicts (i.e. within oneself) and interpersonal conflicts (between individuals) (Tekleab et al. 2009; Jehn 1997), this study solely focuses on conflicts between individuals, as conflicts are always between human beings, whether they arise in a group or not, or whether the reason is task or process oriented (Coleman et al. 2014; Jehn 1997).

In order to understand the nature of conflict more profoundly, the concept will be described in detail in Section 2.2. It should also be noted that, in this study, conflict will be defined as action arousing negative emotions between two individuals; thus, despite the context in which the conflict appears – e.g. within a group or within a person – conflict occurs for instance when parties feel injustice (Coleman et al. 2014; Jehn 1997). Wall and Callister (1995) are listing several causes for escalating conflicts, for instance cultural or status differences between groups, having experienced hostility in the past, having insecure self image. Nevertheless, despite the numerous reasons for causing conflicts, conflicts should be prevented to occur because conflicts increase

anger, hostility, frustration, tension, stress, job satisfaction, and reduce motivation and productivity (Wall & Callister 1995, p. 549).

I have chosen the action research method (Onwuegbuzie & Frels 2016; Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008) because I am strongly integrated as a researcher into the change processes of the organizations in this study, and, more importantly, because the coaching experience itself will help me answer my research question. My study thus focuses on a limited target group: three top managers in the chosen organizations. However, to gain a deeper understanding of the leaders who I am coaching, I have included coachees (CEOs), top management teams (TMTs), individual managers and extended management team members in my interviews. In this study, all three leaders faced conflicts between the leader and an employee. Two of them faced also conflicts between their employees.

These three leaders were chosen according to their needs, which I interpreted as interpersonal conflicts, and according to their company's profound need for transformation. I will describe the reasons for choosing both the leaders and their specific organizations in more depth in Chapter 3.

To the best of my knowledge, the study at hand is the only study that explicitly focuses on coaches supporting leaders to resolve interpersonal conflict situations in a more transformational style.

1.4 Structure of This Study

The first chapter of this study frames the study by introducing the research gap and purpose and research question. It also presents the focus areas, which are transformational leadership, interpersonal conflicts and coaching.

The second chapter provides an overview of the theory related to leadership, interpersonal conflicts and coaching research. The chapter begins by introducing the history of leadership research and exploring the different topics and focuses that can be identified in the leadership literature. After this, a closer view of transformational leadership, which is the focal concept in this study together with interpersonal conflicts and coaching, will be presented. In addition, my own role as a coach in this study will be presented, as the researcher's role is central when action research is chosen as the research method.

The third chapter introduces the methodology and methods of the study. This chapter outlines the whole research design and describes the observation period (two years and 10 months), explaining how the leaders were found and how the research was conducted and reporting on the research process and the kind of research materials collected. In addition, this chapter also presents the whole research framework, comprising the entire coaching process, my role as a coach and the role of the leaders. Furthermore, the chapter also describes the techniques used to coach the

three leaders, the complex interpersonal conflict situation and the leaders' ability to resolve interpersonal conflicts.

Chapter four is dedicated to the leaders' specific processes and describing their daily actions. In this chapter, some interpersonal conflict situations are presented to give an understanding, of the nature of the situations observed. Moreover, discussions with the leaders are written verbatim in order to demonstrate the level of intimacy of the discussion and thus show the reader the level of trust required to support the leader in the necessary way to foster development. In addition, this chapter introduces a cross-case analysis and reviews the theory and research questions through the coachees, i.e. leaders, and observations.

The last chapter discusses whether coaching was effective in terms of helping these leaders learn to better resolve interpersonal conflict situations. This chapter highlights the implications of coaching and discusses the study's contributions to the existing literature on transformational leadership style, resolving interpersonal conflicts and coaching. This chapter also describes future avenues for resolving interpersonal conflicts in every day working life and coaching as a supportive method for leaders to more effectively learn to perform their role in interpersonal conflict situations.

2. Theoretical Framework

“When we plunge into the organizational literature on leadership we quickly become lost in a labyrinth: there are endless definitions, countless articles and never-ending polemics. As far as leadership studies go, it seems that more and more has been studied about less and less, to end up ironically with a group of researchers studying everything about nothing. It prompted one wit to say recently that reading the current world literature on leadership is rather like going through the Parisian telephone directory while trying to read it in Chinese!”

- Manfred Kets De Vries (1994, p. 73) -

2.1 Transformational Leadership

This chapter presents a short leadership history from 1930 until 2018. It describes the transformational process of leadership in order to better understand leadership diversity.

Earlier leadership theories led to the birth of transformational leadership theory, which has been especially dominant since the 1990s in the field of leadership research. In his summary of research on leadership styles, Northouse (2016) claims there have been at least 65 different concepts of leadership styles, none of which, however, have provided a specific answer to the question of what good leadership is or what makes a good leader. Northouse condenses these concepts into six different approaches to leadership on the basis of academic discussion during the past 40 years:

1. Leadership is seen as the focus of group processes (Northouse 2016; Bass 1990). This approach claims that the leader is in the middle of the group and expresses the group's will.
2. Leadership is approached from a personality perspective. This approach sees leadership as “a combination of special traits and characteristics that some individuals possess” (Northouse

2016, p.5). This approach also suggests that a leader has some special traits. Using these traits, leaders inspire their followers to achieve given goals.

3. Leadership is an act or behaviour. From this perspective, leadership is seen as depending on a leader who acts or behaves in a certain way in order to influence the team.
4. Leadership is a power relationship. This approach claims that leaders have power, which they can use to influence their followers to change.
5. Leadership is a transformational process. This approach believes that leaders can inspire their followers to participate in a transformational process, thereby motivating team members to accomplish more than what was expected from them at the beginning.
6. Finally, leadership is seen through the perspective of skills. This approach highlights the capabilities, meaning knowledge and skills, which are making effective leadership possible (Northouse 2016).

It has been argued that, during the 21st century, leaders have been required to focus – even more than before – on effectiveness, role specifications and developing corporate identity (Corley & Gioia 2004; Alvesson & Sveningsson 2003). Avolio, Walumbwa and Weber (2009, p. 423), argue that leadership is “a complex social dynamic”, an interaction between a leader and the ones to be led. However, as Northouse (2016) notes, it is easily forgotten that a leader is also an actor in the very group that the leader is leading, and therefore followership should be a prominent part of leadership research. In turn, Blake and Mouton (1985, p. 198) describe leadership processes as follows: “Processes of leadership are involved in achieving results with and through others”. This requires the ability to motivate followers and enhance team cohesion.

Some scholars define leadership as a reciprocal interaction between followers and leaders, each influencing the other (Uhl-Bien et al. 2014; Avolio 2007; Hogg 2001; Bass 1990). Humphrey (2014) goes as far as to claim that if there is no impact there is no leadership, meaning that leadership does not occur only because there is a leader and there are followers; rather, some kind of impact or behavioural change must arise before leadership has occurred. Humphrey (2014) also provides another interesting definition of leadership by pointing out that leaders are mirroring the will of the larger part of the followers, meaning that leaders become leaders because followers create favourable circumstances for them to adopt that role.

In addition, Osborn, Hunt and Jauch (2002) include the organization and its context (i.e. the business environment) in their definition of leadership. They challenge dominant ideas of leadership, arguing that leadership is not only an interaction between leaders and followers but also a dialogue between the environment and between leaders and the outcomes of

interaction processes. Humphrey (2014) also recognizes the importance of the environment and its impact on leadership, highlighting that leadership is affected by the business sector, company culture and operating environment.

One could thus argue that leadership cannot be removed from its context; leadership is not performed by an individual in a vacuum where nothing else will influence the leader's performance than the leader herself. Instead, leadership is bidirectional, meaning there is no leadership without followers who influence the leader's performance. Even if the leader has been seen as a "heroic" role, as some scholars claim (Northouse 2016; Bass & Riggio 2006), leaders are incapable of acting effectively in their role without a team supporting that role and their performance. Thus, in line with Northouse (2016), leadership is never a one-way performance, and followers should be taken into account when discussing leadership. Kets De Vries (1994) also underlines the importance of followers in his writings, claiming that to be a good leader, good followers are required; i.e. well-performing leaders cannot exist without support from their followers. Kets De Vries also calls for followers to take responsibility instead of "blaming" a leader for being a bad leader. Followers should thus accept more responsibility for their own development and support their leader.

Van Knippenberg (2011) too describes leadership as a process created by leaders and their followers. Van Knippenberg's theory is in the line with Hogg's (2001, p. 184), who describes leadership as "a group process generated by social categorization and prototype-based depersonalization processes associated with social identity". In this study, I rely on Northouse's (2016) and Kets De Vries' (2016) assumptions about leadership: it should be understood as a holistic reciprocal relation.

(Middlehurst 1995), in turn, summarizes leadership as being responsible for other people and their actions; thus, a leader takes responsibility in good and bad, especially when something sudden and inconvenient occurs. Middlehurst's definition of leadership is similar to that of deep trust, where leaders help their followers perform well and support them in their intellectual and spiritual development (Bass 1999; Avolio 1999). A leader plays the role of an enabler, facilitating the achievement of tasks and helping followers reach mutually agreed goals. However, as Northouse (2016) and Humphrey (2014) acknowledge, despite all the definitions of leadership, it is impossible to describe it succinctly.

A leader is born

Much scholarly debate has focused on whether a leader is born with or learns certain traits. Saeed et al. (2014) and Bass (1990) argue that leadership can and should be taught. However, not everyone is capable of becoming a professional, effective and successful leader, due, for example, to a lack of the necessary motivation or other characteristics and traits. For example, leaders must communicate clearly and deliver their vision and the purpose of the tasks they assign. Moreover, they must be capable of self-regulation

and self-reflection, emotional intelligence and the willingness to develop themselves (Bass 1999; Capowski 1994). Furthermore, intelligence, self-confidence, determination, integrity and sociability are required from a leader (Northouse 2016; Bass 1999). What is more, a leader needs to have the willingness to lead, as Bass (1999) observes. The most challenging aspect in teaching leadership, however, is whether a person is willing to learn to be a good leader, whether leaders even want to develop themselves or whether they are capable of understanding the essence of leadership (Bass 1999).

To become a leader may sometimes require an enormous transformation, changes in a person's behaviour and development in self-esteem and emotional intelligence, and this might not be possible for everybody. According to Kirkpatrick and Locke (1991), a leader should have such traits as drive, motivation, ambition, energy, tenacity, and the desire to be a leader, but not simply in order to acquire power. In addition, it has been argued that a leader should possess traits like honesty, integrity, cognitive ability and knowledge of the business, and what is more, self-confidence, which is associated – according to these scholars – with emotional stability (Kirkpatrick & Locke 1991, p. 48).

Over the past 50 years, leadership scholars have increasingly studied leadership styles (Avolio 2007; Bass & Steidlmeier 1999). They argue that not one but several different leadership styles are required in order to meet the leadership requirements of today (Jin et al. 2015; Carter & Greer 2013; Kets De Vries 2009; Avolio et al. 2009; Dulewicz & Higgs 2005; Goleman 2000; Bass 1990). Thus, leaders are unable to lead and influence their followers and motivate them to perform more efficiently when applying one leadership style. Instead, according to Bass and Steidlmeier (1999), a leader must be capable of applying several leadership styles in changing environments and in different organizational settings.

According to Northouse (2016) and Bryman et al. (1996), leadership research has evolved from a focus on a leader's individual traits, i.e. specific personal traits that the leader is born with, to behavioural leadership, which concerns what leaders do and the way they do it.

Trait theories formed the core of leadership research before and after the Second World War. During the 1930s and the 1940s, scholars strongly believed that leadership traits were part of inborn personality (Northouse 2016; Derue, Nahrgang, Wellman & Humphrey 2011). A person was born to be a leader through the possession of innate traits necessary for performing as a leader. Stogdill (1974) summarized over 287 trait studies conducted between 1904 and 1970. Stogdill (1948; 1974) concluded that a leader differed considerably from an average team member. However, leaders do not become leaders solely because of their traits but because those traits are significant for the situation in question (Northouse 2016; Bass & Stogdill 1990).

The traits that typify leaders tend to be divided in three categories: 1. personality traits such as intelligence, fluency of speech and skills to lead a group, 2. physical qualities such as height, weight and age, and 3. personality

characteristics such as self-confidence, interpersonal sensitivity and emotional reliance and control (Northouse 2016; Derue et al. 2011; Middlehurst 1993; Kotter 1990). These qualities were believed to be inherited and already detectable in early childhood (Burns 1978; Middlehurst 1993).

After the era of trait theories, both personal and situational factors came into focus. The late 1940s and early 1950s saw the inception of the behavioural era in leadership research, when Ohio State University of Michigan began to conduct studies based on Stogdill's work on traits (Northouse 2016). One of the categories they examined, key personality characteristics, is the most relevant to the present discussion of leader emergence (Northouse 2016).

Over the last three decades, scholars have discussed whether there is a genetic basis for leadership or whether it can be learned (De Neve, Mikhaylov, Daves, Christakis & Fowler 2013; Avolio et al. 2009; Bass 1990). Bass (1990), however, argues strongly against the claim that leadership is primarily determined by genetics. He claims that leadership can be learned and that transformational leadership studies, in particular, should be part of leadership education.

After focusing on personality traits, scholars turned their attention to leaders' behaviours. Behavioural theories aim to explain two primary behaviours of a leader: task-based and people-based (Blake & Mouton 1964). In the behavioural approach, leadership is seen as the behaviour, in an organization, of introducing a task for followers to accomplish. According to Blake and Mouton (1985), leaders either approach leadership by leading the task or by leading their followers to accomplish that task.

The behavioural approach to leadership research has existed since the 1950s, and thus to understand the current concept of leadership, behavioural leadership is worth investigating in greater depth. Northouse (2016) divides leadership behaviours into task and process-related behaviours: task behaviour relates to the tasks to be performed, while process behaviour refers to supporting employees, making team members feel comfortable and creating a feeling of belonging within a team (Northouse 2016, p. 6). In turn, Bass and Riggio (2006) divide leadership styles into three categories: 1. task versus people-orientated, 2. autocratic versus democratic, and 3. directive versus participative styles. According to Middlehurst (1993), the central models in the behavioural leadership approach include the Managerial Grid Model by Blake and Mouton (1964), Fielder's Contingency model (1964), the Path-Goal model by House (1971), and the situational leadership model by Hersey and Blanchard (1969). These approaches will be explained next.

The Managerial Grid Model describes five different styles according to a leader's concern for people or tasks. Blake and Mouton (1985) created the Managerial Grid Model to identify relevant leader behaviour. This model was believed to help leaders better analyse their leadership styles. Blake and Mouton (1985) asserted that it was possible to describe leaders' behaviour by dividing it into two components: 1. a primary concern for followers, or 2. a primary concern for organizational productivity and results. In the grid, concern for people i.e. taking subordinates' concerns into consideration

and prioritizing them, appears on the y-axis, while concern for productivity and results is shown on the x-axis. Using this grid, the authors depicted five different leadership styles: 1. Impoverished Management: performing the minimum to get work done, 2. Task Management: being more concerned about production than people; 3. Middle-of-the-road: trying to maintain the balance between the company's needs and subordinates' requirements; 4. Country Club: a high level of concern for people – believing in providing a friendly environment to motivate subordinates, less concern for productivity; and 5. Team Management: focusing strongly on both people and tasks.

The grid divides a leader's behaviour into a further seven elements: 1) Initiative: taking action, driving and supporting; 2) Inquiry: questioning, researching and verifying understanding; 3) Advocacy: expressing convictions and championing ideas; 4) Decision making: evaluating resources, choices and consequences; 5) Conflict resolution: confronting and resolving disagreements; 6) Resilience: dealing with problems, setbacks and failures; and 7) Critique: delivering objectives, candid feedback.

The Managerial Grid also supports the basic assumptions of the present study; thus, although this study relies strongly on Bass's (1990) transformational leadership style, it does not rule out other leadership approaches, such as the Managerial Grid. After the Managerial Grid Model, leadership research moved from earlier behaviourism to leadership styles and performance (Northouse 2016).

Fielder's Contingency Model (1964) focused on a leader's orientation, whether a leader is task or people-oriented, and on performance according to the situation, i.e. the best and most desirable way to lead in a given set of circumstances. Fielder (1964) explained that leadership should not be seen solely as a leader's performance but also as an act in its context, which is influenced by followers, the complexity of tasks, the organization in question and its culture. Thus, although Fielder's (1964) Contingency Model focused on leaders' behaviour, for the first time in research it also took into account situational factors. In turn, the Path-Goal Model by House and Mitchell (1975) posits that leaders' behaviour has significance for their followers' performance; more specifically, whether followers see goals as motivating and beneficial depends on the leader.

Hersey and Blanchard's (1969) well-known situational leadership model came close to the Path-Goal model: it was the leader's responsibility to change leadership style according to the needs of followers and the situation.

Northouse's (2016) and Angawi's (2012) descriptions of previously topical leadership approaches are similar to those of Middlehurst (1993) in that they identify trait, behavioural, situational, contingency and decision-making approaches. These different approaches indicate the diversity within the field of leadership research. Thus, to understand leadership, it should be investigated from various perspectives.

Contingency and situational factor theories state the absurdity of a leader predicting the outcome of a particular activity or action: the leader is not solely responsible for the success of the organization, as other factors are

important, including the situation and context, followers, the leader's own personality and even the profiles of the tasks to be achieved (Fiedler 1964). This approach lightens the burden of responsibility that leaders must carry on their shoulders.

Various theories of leadership behaviour have gained prominence during the past hundred years, but behavioural theories were especially dominant during the 1970s in academia (Van Knippenberg 2011; Avolio 2007; Yukl 1999). Such theories argued that it was not leaders' personality but their way of leading that mattered most; i.e. the way in which a leader behaved was argued to be the essence of leadership. Behavioural scholars (Fiedler 1964; House & Mitchell 1974) claimed that leaders needed to reconcile their leadership style to the current situation; they were required to change their way of behaving according to the requirements of the task at hand, the environment and the specific situation (Vroom & Yetton 1973; House 1971; Blake & Mouton 1964; Fielder 1964). These researchers thus seem to be suggesting that different situations and environments require a different style of leadership. Thus, these studies indicate that performing in a crisis situation requires different leadership styles to performing in the every-day office or factory environment. Moreover, as one and the same leadership style does not fit every situation, leaders are required to possess a good understanding of the situation and its demands.

During the 1970s, Skinner's (1968) positive reinforcement contingency theory of motivation started to gain ground and became an important focus in leadership research. Skinner stated that each individual's behaviour was the function of certain consequences; i.e. that behaviour is affected by previous experiences. This meant that if a follower was supported by the leader, it would influence that follower's behaviour in a positive way. In order to reach a goal, a leader thus needed to support and reinforce their subordinates. Skinner described four primary approaches for reinforcement: positive reinforcement, negative reinforcement, positive punishment, and negative punishment. The theory was then transformed into the positive reinforcement in leadership approach: the more a leader gives positive feedback, the more effectively the follower will perform (Hinkin & Schriesheim 2015; Deci 1971; Amsel 1967; Skinner 1968). At the same time, the primary question of effective leadership evolved (Northouse 2016), and contingency theories, focusing specifically on effectiveness in leadership, began to emerge during the 1970s and 1980s (Avolio 2007). Skinner's (1968) reinforcement theory can also be identified as an underpinning of this research: the more followers are praised and encouraged by their leader, the more motivated they are to work and to transform.

The 'life cycle theory' by Paul Hersey and Ken Blanchard (1969), later named the 'Situational Leadership Model', became the central interest of leadership theory during the 1980s (Northouse 2016). It was strongly argued that the dominant leadership style should be varied according to the situation (Hersey & Blanchard 1969). At approximately the same time, Burns' (1978) significant contribution to leadership research, i.e. his theories

of transformational and transactional leadership (Bass & Riggio 2006), began to develop. When compiling the biographies of American presidents, Burns (1978) divided leaders into two categories: those leaders who were transformational and those who were transactional. Transformational leaders were defined as leaders who inspired and intellectually stimulated their followers to transform their own self-interest to benefit the organization or society (Judge & Bono 2000; Bass 1990). Transactional leaders, in turn, were defined as being more focused on the organization, its resources and problem solving, gaining their rewards from succeeding in reaching the given goals (Bass 1990; Tichy & Devanna 1986).

However, although transformational and transactional leadership theories already started to be ascendant in the 1970s, transformational leadership research did not begin to accumulate until in the early 1990s, after leadership theorists progressed to researching leadership skills and attempting to answer to the question of what kind of leadership style achieves the best results (Boal & Hooijberg 2001; Yukl 1999).

The 1990s were strongly influenced by Bass's (1985) widely cited transformational leadership theory, originally based on Burns' (1978) theory of leadership. Since the 1990s, transformational leadership research has been further developed by numerous scholars, such as Dóci and Hofmans (2015), who describe how a leader can adopt a transformational leadership style in almost any situation, providing there are not too many complex factors. Tichy and Devanna (1986) developed Bass's vision even further, describing a leader as a "change agent" who needed to tackle complexity and unclear situations. They also termed a leader a life-long learner. These scholars also expanded the concept of transformational leadership to include both followers and leader's emotions (Gooty, Connelly, Grif & Gupta 2010). Bass and Avolio (1994) introduced Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire to evaluate leader's transformational leadership style. Bass (1990; 1999) identified and introduced four factors – individualized consideration, intellectual stimulation, inspirational motivation and idealized influence – which became key elements of transformational leadership and are known as Bass's four I's (Northouse 2016; Bass 1990).

Since the late 1990s, key leadership researchers have once again focused on leader personality (Steffens, Haslam, Reicher, Platow, Franssen, Yang, Ryan, Jetten, Peters & Boen 2014; Hannah & Avolio 2011). For instance, Steffens et al. (2014, p. 1002) refer to "leaders' identity prototypicality", meaning that leaders are "seen to be representative – or prototypical – of the groups they seek to lead". These groups display certain attributes that stem from the leader's performance, thereby distinguishing the leader from others i.e. leaders are seen as individuals with special traits.

As we approach 2020, leadership research is increasingly focusing on leader personality and identity, such as the developmental processes of self-awareness, self-regulation, and ethical caring for followers and the organization (Crosby 2010; Gardner, Avolio, Luthans, May & Walumbwa 2005). At a more detailed level, Gardner et al. (2005, p. 343) have investigated

the leader-follower relationship, which includes “heightened levels of follower trust in the leader, engagement, workplace well-being and veritable, sustainable performance”. It has thus been argued that future leadership requires from a leader emotional intelligence (Goleman 2000; 1996), and authentic leadership, including emotional competencies (Gooty et al. 2010) (emotional intelligence will be explained later). The research of Avolio et al. (2004) focused on positive emotional competencies, such as hope and optimism, which are considered the focal competencies required of a future leader to create a trusted leader-follower relationship.

Future leaders are said to be leaders with good self-awareness and self-esteem, concern for their followers, and a self-assertive approach (Avolio et al. 2009; Boal & Hooijberg 2001). However, one may ask what it means to be self-assertive or possess good self-esteem. These are very subjective qualities that are difficult to measure, although Doci and Hoffmans (2015) claim this can be achieved by CSE, core self-evaluation.

Future leadership

These scholars furthermore emphasize that the focus for future research should be the true development of leadership. According to Avolio et al. (2009, p. 245), only 201 studies have been conducted on leadership development and the “linkage between cognitive science [and] how leaders perceive, decide, behave, and take action”. The central focus of new leadership research is interpersonal processes, i.e. human relations between leaders and employees. However, Lehmann-Willenbrock et al. (2015) also underline communication between followers and leaders and its impact on team dynamics. These scholars claim that followers’ behaviour can be influenced by leaders, whose role is pivotal during team meetings while creating new solutions and solving problems. Leaders who possess managerial wisdom and the capacity to learn and adapt to circumstances, who understand the requirements of the situation and are able to adjust their own conduct accordingly, are the leaders who achieve the best results (Boal & Hooijberg 2001; Avolio et al. 2009; Bass & Riggio 2006). What is more, not only do leaders need to ensure that their company’s product “continues to improve”, but they also need to understand the impacts of technology (Boal & Hooijberg 2001, p. 535). Thus, leaders not only require the skills to lead but also knowledge and understanding of current technologies, which are rapidly changing.

The new focus areas of leadership research – as I see them – are some of the most crucial leadership approaches at present. In addition, it has also been argued that the most important ‘component’ of a leader is the capacity to “differentiate emotions in self and others” (Boal & Hooijberg 2001, p. 533). In other words, leaders need to have good self-esteem in order to distinguish between their own and others’ emotions, especially in interpersonal conflict situations (Kets De Vries 2017; Thomas 1992).

Boal and Hooijberg (2001, p. 530) further argue that “leaders who perform multiple leadership roles score higher on leadership effectiveness than those who do not”. However, leaders not only need a large “behavioural repertoire” – i.e. different styles/ways to behave – they also require the ability – i.e. the intelligence – to choose the right role for the situation at hand. As Kets De Vries (2017) observes, not everything can be seen with one’s eyes; a leader also needs to have the capability of reading people, of knowing what is appropriate and when. Furthermore, leaders also need to be very sensitive and well aware of their own feelings in order to sense their interlocutor’s mood (Srivastava, Bartol & Locke 2006). This is a core factor in social intelligence and in a leader’s ability to be successful.

Srivastava et al.’s (2006) claim about emotions supports Goleman’s (1996) approach to leadership research. Goleman asserts that leaders with emotional intelligence – self-awareness, self-regulation, social skills, empathy and motivation – have the ability to perceive the various meanings of emotions. Thus, a leader with emotional intelligence can better understand the other party and his/her emotions and can more easily see the causes and effects of different emotions. In turn, understanding the causes and reasons for such emotions facilitates the easier resolution of conflicts (Coleman et al. 2014; Goleman 1996). Goleman (1996) points out that emotional intelligence – understanding emotions – can be also learned, and should be taught to leaders to help them more efficiently solve organizational problems. Goleman is recalling for teaching leaders understanding empathy as one of the emotions, which is crucial for conflict resolution: understanding the emotions and feelings of others enables more effective interpersonal conflict resolution. According to Deutsch (1990), educating leaders in knowing themselves enables them to deal with their anxieties about conflicts and identifying their ways of dealing with conflicts more efficiently. It can also be argued that Boal and Hooijberg’s (2001) research on leadership diversity, the ability to develop managerial wisdom and the capacity to learn is related to emotional intelligence (Goleman 1995).

Recent leadership research has focused on both permanent and momentary structures, such as the line organization and organizational culture, for defining the goals of work and for maintaining a caring workplace atmosphere. Leaders are ingrained in the workplace atmosphere, recognizing their followers differing needs, feelings and behaviours in order to perform in the ever-changing business environment (Dinh et al. 2014).

Focusing on the full-range model of leadership

This brief review of the last century of leadership research theories demonstrates that while new approaches and techniques are constantly evolving, a few common themes have remained the bedrock of the field, including what makes a good leader or manager, leadership as a manifestation of innate personal characteristics and leadership as a combination of traits and learned skills. In addition, prominent topics have included

the number of personal traits we are born with and the number that are acquired through learning and experience, how managers relate to their employees, how leaders can have an optimal positive effect on employee behaviour, and whether employees affect how managers perform their responsibilities. This last theme regarding the influence of followers on leaders' performance only became a central research theme in the 1990s. Other questions that academics have wrestled with over the years include how to best direct a team effort towards a commonly agreed goal, and, of course, the characteristics of poor leadership. One may ask whether this number of theories is needed. However, these theories are indeed required to understand how leaders could improve their performance – how they could influence their followers and help them perform in an outstanding manner to achieve superior results. Myriad theories are also necessary to understand why leaders fail in their role.

Of the many theories that exist, this study relies primarily on a behavioural approach, specifically Bass and Riggio's (2006) full range model of leadership, by focusing on both active leadership styles (charismatic leadership and transformational leadership), and passive leadership styles like management-by-expectation, which is part of transactional leadership, and the laissez-faire leadership style.

Leaders perform in extremely diverse situations and environments, in different cultures and with unequal experiences, and they do not always achieve the optimum or even the minimum performance required. This literature review provides a clear picture of how the study of leadership has expanded its scope, with the particular abilities of top management and leaders no longer being the only explanatory factors considered when business results and development needs are analysed. Nevertheless, it is evident that leaders are important factors in creating and inspiring business success.

Table 1 summarizes the main leadership approaches focused on by research during the past hundred years. During that time, the study of leadership has moved beyond the theory of personality traits (Stogdill 1948; Barnard 1968) to investigate the deeper identity of leaders, or what is known as their 'true self' (Steffens et al. 2014; Carter & Greer 2013; Ladkin & Taylor 2010). The role of followership (Middlehurst 1993), i.e. role of the employee, has also been considered. Current research has taken a greater interest in leadership styles and approaches (Carter & Greer 2013), while the concept of e-leadership – leading through Internet while having employees, for example, in different countries – has also inspired analysis (Avolio et al. 2001).

Theoretical Framework

Table 1. Main leadership approaches during the past 100 years

| Century | Focus area | Description | Researcher |
|-----------|--|---|---|
| 1930-1940 | Trait theories become the focus of defining leadership: Leaders are born with specific personal traits (gender, intelligence, personality). | Leaders are believed to be born with innate leadership capabilities, characteristics and traits. | Stogdill (1948) Barnard (1978) Derue et al. (2011) Northouse (2016) |
| 1940-1950 | Leadership theories start to move towards behaviourism. Group theory becomes popular. Managerial Grid model is born. Contingency theory of leadership is developed by Fielder. | Group theory defines what leaders do in groups and how leaders influence the group to achieve common goals. Managerial grid model – including five different leadership styles – is developed by Blake and Mouton (1957): 1.Impoverished Management 2.Task Management 3.Middle-of-the-road 4.Country Club 5.Team Management Contingency theory claims that there is no one most effective way of leading; rather, different styles are required depending on internal and external situations: A leader needs to act according to the situation – effective leadership styles could be taught. The leader becomes part of the organization. Leadership is no longer characterized as enduring individual traits. | Hemphill (1949) Blake and Mouton (1957) Seeman (1960) Northouse (2016) Fielder 1964 |
| 1960-1970 | From behaviourism to leadership styles and performance, a leader's effectiveness. | Leadership is defined through two behaviours: task and relationship: i.e. what leaders do and how they act to help followers achieve goals and feel comfortable with themselves. | Blake and Mouton (1964) Northouse (2016) |
| 1970-1980 | The focus shifts to Leaders' influence in focus. B.F. Skinner launches the concept of positive reinforcement theory. Leaders' traits are also back in focus. Situational leadership model: Leaders should adapt to the changing environment and change their leadership style accordingly: • Directing • Coaching • Supporting Transformational and transactional leadership concepts are introduced by Burns. Transformational leadership expanded by Bass. | The leader is seen as a servant who helps subordinates achieve common goals. Reinforcement leadership provides better performance: a leader should strengthen desired behaviour. Robert Greenleaf's Servant Leadership is published. Effective leadership varies according to tasks, situation, group and goals. Paul Hersey and Ken Blanchard claim there is no single most appropriate style of leadership. The situation in which the leader exists must be taken into consideration. Surroundings have an impact on leadership styles. > situational leadership is born. Burns claims there are two types of leaders: transactional, who reward the outcome, and transformational, who reward the process that leads to a mutually agreed goal. Multi factor leadership questionnaire (MLQ) is developed: It defines different leadership characteristics: 1) Idealized influence 2) Inspirational motivation 3) Intellectual stimulation 4) Individualized consideration | Skinner (1968) Greenleaf (1977) Bass (1990) Northouse (2016) Hersey and Blanchard (1969) Gardner (1990) Burns (1978) Bass (1990) Burns (1978) Bass and Avolio (1994) |

Theoretical Framework

| | | | |
|-------|--|---|---|
| 1990> | <p>Transformational and transactional leadership theories expand and incorporate other leadership theories: spiritual, servant, adaptive, authentic, laissez-faire, charismatic, strategic etc. Conflicts in leadership are also in the interests of leadership researchers.</p> <p>Thomas and Killman introduce a conflict model instrument which includes 30 different conflict situations.</p> <p>A leader needs additional skills.</p> <p>Effective leadership.</p> <p>Gardner's emotional intelligence influences leadership theorists.</p> | <p>Leadership research expands to focus more on a leader's individual influence. A leader can perform different leadership styles to influence followers and reach the common goal.</p> <p>Effective leadership leans on Skinners (1959) reinforcement theories.</p> <p>Emotional intelligence: one part of intelligence.</p> | <p>Bass and Steildmeier (1999) Ladkin and Taylor (2010) Bass and Riggio (2006)</p> <p>Thomas (1992)</p> <p>Horner (1997)</p> <p>Skinner (1968) Hinkin and Schriesheim (2015) Gardner (1990)</p> |
| 2000 | <p>Theories again express interest in a leader's personality.</p> <p>Empowering leadership.</p> <p>Destructive leadership interests scholars.</p> | <p>Theories move from leadership skills to leadership styles and a leader's personality.</p> <p>Destructive leadership is also of interest in leadership research.</p> | <p>Higgs (2009) Phipps (2012) Xu et al. (2015)</p> |
| 2010 | E-leadership. | How to benefit from the Internet in leadership. How to take followers into consideration when an organization is divided into separate countries. | <p>Conger and Kanungo (1987) Avolio (2001) Northouse (2016)</p> |
| 2020 | Authentic leadership shared leadership, followership, reinforcement theory rises again. | An organization performs better through reinforcement. A leader's true self attracts more interest among scholars. A leader's role should be divided; there should not be only one and the same leader all the time. | <p>Humphrey 2014 Ladkin and Taylor (2010) Carter and Greer (2013) Gardner et al. 2005)</p> |

As can be seen, leadership research focuses heavily on the kind of leader a leader should be, on the type of leadership styles that should be adopted to gain the best results. In addition, scholars have expressed increased interest in topics related to the qualities affecting a leader's ability to get followers to work together, they way a leader's work impacts the environment and how followers succeed. Moreover, studies have begun to explore more widely the role of followers and their influence on the success of the leader in his work. Today, scholars also acknowledge the role of a leader's personality traits in the success or failure of the leader.

The breadth and depth of the leadership research field is seen in the number of studies, which have dramatically increased during the past 20 years (Dinh et al. 2014; Dionne et al. 2013). In an article in the *Leadership Quarterly Journal*, Dionne et al. (2013) reviewed research on leadership styles during the past 25 years.¹ They identified 29 categories defining leadership, which are listed in alphabetical order below:

1 The Leadership Quarterly, Administrative Science Quarterly, American Psychologist, Journal of Management, Academy of Management Journal, Academy of Management Review, Journal of Applied Psychology, Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes, Organizational Science, and Personnel Psychology.

1. authentic leadership, 2. behavioural theories, 3. charismatic leadership, 4. the charismatic–ideological–pragmatic model, 5. cognitive theories, 6. collectivistic theories, 7. contingency theories, 8. creativity and innovation, 9. culture and diversity, 10. emotions, 11. ethical leadership, 12. executive leadership, 13. follower-centric theories, 14. leader–follower relations, 15. leader-member exchange (LMX), 16. leadership development, 17. leadership emergence, 18. leadership in teams and groups, 19. motivational theories, 20. politics and public leadership, 21. power and influence tactics, 22. spiritual leadership, 23. substitutes for leadership, 24. trait theories, 25. transformational leadership, 26. vertical dyad linkage (VDL), 27. individualized leadership, 28. new methods and analytic techniques, and 29. multiple theories, and general (category general is not defined more precisely) (Dionne et al. 2014).

This list clearly demonstrates the diversity of leadership theories and how leadership can be seen from various perspectives. Dinh et al. (2014), in turn, performed a qualitative review of leadership theories from 2000 until 2012 using 10 top-tier academic publications in leadership; they identified as many as 66 different leadership theory domains.

So-called destructive leadership was not part of the main focus areas, but due the fact that it is now a growing field of research and is adding a much-needed perspective to management theories, destructive leadership deserves a short presentation.

This new field of research has led to the development of novel solutions for how to deal with poor managers and dysfunctional leaders (Xu, Loi & Lam 2015; Higgs 2009). Individuals who are capable of performing as an expert are not necessarily competent in leadership. Moreover, dysfunctional leaders are often seen as extremely effective in gaining results. However, such leaders decrease well-being in organizations, thereby damaging work motivation and team cohesion (Higgs 2009).

This review indicates that there is no single correct way to be a leader or a manager, although there may be certain situations in which a specific leadership style has been proven to lead to the best outcome. All leaders are the sum of what they have learned, their personality traits, and their experiences.

The interplay of myriad factors must be accounted for when considering leadership: the working environment and its location, employees, work culture, the organization, attitudes, and even the specifics of the moment at hand all influence leadership (Hendel et al. 2005). Leadership also includes negative perspectives: destructive leadership is hardly growing scarcer and is certainly not about to disappear; therefore it cannot be ignored. Consequently, the topic has attracted growing interest among some leadership scholars (Xu et al. 2015; Higgs 2009).

The transformational leadership style has undoubtedly been shown to be the most effective in the demands and challenges presented above: first, several scholars claim a relationship between transformational leadership and effectiveness (Tims et al. 2011; Cho & Dansereau 2010; Walter & Bruch

2010; Boerner et al. 2007). More specifically, however, scholars identify transformational leadership as the most advantageous leadership style in relation to well-being, increased team cohesion and successful conflict management (Saeed et al. 2014; Avolio 2011; Bass & Riggio 2006; Bass 1990).

2.1.1 Towards transformational leadership

“They may be charismatic to their followers and thus inspire them; they may meet the emotional needs of each employee; and/or they may intellectually stimulate employees”. (Bass 1999, p. 21)

To gain a boarder view of the full-range model of leadership (Northouse 2016; Bass & Riggio 2006), this chapter draws together some writings on transformational, charismatic and transactional leadership in academic research.

As mentioned earlier in the Introduction, transformational leadership theory (Bass & Riggio 2006; Bass 1999; 1990; 1985; Tichy & Devanna 1986) is recognized as one of the most cited and researched leadership theories of recent decades (Jin et al. 2015; Lehmann-Willenbrock et al. 2015; Dóci & Hofmans 2015; To et al. 2015; Humphrey 2014; Carter & Greer 2013; Menges, Walter, Vogel & Bruch 2011; Tims et al. 2011; Bass & Riggio 2006). Kirkbride’s (2006, p. 27) statement that “good leaders engage in transformational styles more than they do the transactional or non-transactional styles”, clearly suggests the reason for its popularity. The question of what makes a good leader remains one of the main paradigms in leadership research, as seen from the previous 29 points listed above.

At the end of 1970s, followers were not yet part of leadership research. Leadership was primarily seen as the actions of leaders, who used their power to motivate subordinates to reach commonly agreed goals in the most efficient way. James McGregor Burns (1978) nevertheless wished to combine leadership and followership, thereby formulating a new concept of leadership. Burns (1978, p. 19) wrote that it was time to define leadership as “leaders inducing followers to act for certain goals that represent the values and the motivations – the wants and needs, the inspirations and expectation – of both leaders and followers”. Burns (1978) further claimed that there were two types of leaders: transformational leaders, who focus on “what you can do for the country”, and transactional leaders, who emphasise “what the country can do for you” (Bass 1999, p. 9). Burns’ (1978) seminal theory of transformational and transactional leadership was rooted in research on US politicians and presidents. Burns (1978) thus created the concept of a transformational leader, who nourishes and encourages her followers and receives nourishment and encouragement from them in return in order to achieve a far superior performance level than expected for the benefit of the entire organization. The transformational leader was described as a leader

who engages followers in a common purpose to transform the self-interest of individuals to benefit the company. Transformational leaders were also defined as more devoted to their followers and better able to understand their strengths, support and motivate them individually and stimulate new ways of thinking (Bass 1999; Hater & Bass 1988; Burns 1978).

Transformational leadership includes Bass's four I's – leadership factors, which are the key characteristics and essence of transformational leadership. Bass's four I's are listed below:

1. **Individualized consideration** occurs when leaders coach or mentor their followers. Leaders are truly concerned for their followers' well-being and interested in their development in order for them to attain the highest standard in their work and achievements. The aim is to support individual needs and development to enable the follower's personal growth. Leaders need to reflect on the acceptance of different personalities; the intention is to see each individual as a person, not only as an employee. This allows the leader to raise the targets that each follower should reach. The leader's task is also to delegate and offer support, prevent followers from feeling they are being monitored and enhance their feelings of being respected as reliable team members (Uusi-Kaakkuri 2017; Northouse 2016; Bass 1999; Bass & Steidlmeier 1999).
2. **Intellectual stimulation** occurs when a leader encourages followers to be creative, question existing assumptions and thereby find new solutions (Northouse 2016; Bass 1999). If mistakes occur, a leader's role is not to give negative feedback in front of the others; rather, it is to provide support and find new solutions together with the followers. If followers express ideas and solutions that differ from the leader's own ideas, they are not criticized outright. The leader's role is to involve everybody in challenging old approaches and being part of new innovative thinking (Northouse 2016; Bass 1999; Bass & Steidlmeier 1999).
3. **Inspirational motivation** is a behaviour intended to motivate and inspire followers and raise team spirit. By inspiring their followers, leaders increase their involvement and willingness to reach commonly defined goals. A shared vision is clearly communicated by the leader (Northouse 2016; Bass 1999). Moreover, Bass and Steidlmeier (1999, p. 188) observe that inspirational leaders "tend to focus on the best in people – on harmony, charity and good works".
4. **Idealized influence** refers to acting like a leader who is trusted and respected as a role model (Northouse 2016), and possesses high ethical and moral standards (Bass & Steidlmeier 1999). This is closest to the traditional understanding of charisma, where a leader inspires her followers in a similar manner. The leader's aim is to induce followers to emulate behaviour which

is ethically and morally right. This requires willingness from leaders to consider followers' needs above their own concerns. This includes influence over ideology and ideas (Northouse 2016).

It is well known that transformational leaders aim to challenge existing structures and ways of working in order to find new possibilities to develop the organization (Bass 1999). However, Bass (1999) also described a transformational leader as a person who intellectually inspires followers and who demands that they transform their own self-interest to benefit the company or organization or society in general. In transformational leadership, the aim is to develop greater self-awareness. The vision is to reach a jointly defined goal; therefore, it is not only the followers who aim for this transformation, but also the leader (Bass & Stogdill 1990).

A transformational leader coaches and inspires her followers in an encouraging and supportive way to achieve the best performance and success for the organization by using contingent reinforcement, which is immaterial, and individual support. When motivating their followers, transformational leaders often rely on inspiration instead of setting goals and rewards when once the tasks are achieved (Jin et al. 2015; Bass & Steidlmeier 1999). Transformational leaders can also be directive and participative, democratic or even authoritarian, energetic, active and self-starting. Moreover, they have high self-confidence and are thoughtful (Uusi-Kaakkuri 2017; Bass 1985; 1999). Furthermore, transformational leaders behave in a way that encourages their followers to achieve superior results (Bass & Riggio 2006; Bass & Avolio 1994). Finally, transformational leadership is often combined with charismatic leadership, which is part of idealized influence in the transformational leadership framework or Bass's Four I's (Bass & Riggio 2006; Judge & Bono 2000).

Transformational leadership-related theory has been also developed by Tichy and Devanna (1986). Tichy and Devanna (1986) researched transformational leadership's impact on organizational restructuring, proving that leaders who perform in a transformational way are more successful than leaders who do not. Rowold and Heinitz (2007) further confirm this claim when assessing transformational leadership's impact on profit. The authors found a significant difference in the outcomes of different leadership styles: transformational leadership *per se* appeared to have more impact on profit than charismatic or transactional leadership.

Despite the prominence of this theory in leadership research and the literature, it has not been without its critics. For instance, Van Knippenberg and Sitking (2013) claim that the theory offers no specifications for how to formulate charismatic-transformational leadership and that no consequence model exists to show how different factors influence processes and outcomes. These scholars also find the theory's measurement tools unscientific and suggest that they should not be used. Knippenberg and Sitking's (2013) criticism is in line with that of Yukl (1999), who calls for

more complementary descriptions of the explanatory processes in order to prove that transformational leadership is actually effective.

Moreover, not even transformational leaders can always perform at their best. For instance, Dóci and Hofmans (2015) state that when tasks and situations become problematic, the ability to practise transformational leadership usually decreases. Managers seem to be unable to hold back their frustration or anxiety and lose contact with their true self and their feelings (Ladkin & Taylor 2010). In this scenario, the leader's own fears are projected and made manifest as non-transformational leadership.

Dóci and Hofmans (2015) further posit that when overwhelming work tasks present themselves, leaders may simply not possess the psychological resources to behave in a transformational way. This naturally raises the question of whether a transformational leadership style – or any other leadership style for that matter – should be taught and practised while the leader is at work and facing such obstacles.

Charismatic leadership

Charisma comes from Greek and means a gift which “certain individuals possess that gives them the capacity to do extraordinary things” (Northouse 2016, p. 164). In modern usage, it is, however, based on Max Weber's well-known theory of authority (see Conger & Kanungo 1987). In 1976, House published study on charismatic leadership, which coincided with the publication of Burn's (1976) research on transformational and transactional leadership. In a further study, Fiol, Harris and House (1999) describe charismatic and transformational leadership by illustrating styles which nurture followers, allowing the development of an emotional connection between them and the leader in order to create a better workplace and a more effective organization. Moreover, leaders who adopt charismatic leadership styles articulate a common vision in an understandable way, find innovative solutions in problem-solving and perform more effectively in conflict situations and under stress (Dinh et al. 2014; Angawi 2012). Charismatic leaders are further described as individuals acting on a stage, persuading their audience to accept their opinions. For example, leaders such as Dr. Martin Luther King Jr, Nelson Mandela, Mahatma Gandhi and the Dalai Lama are commonly described as charismatic leaders (Northouse 2016; Bass 1990). Northouse (2016), for instance, write that great charismatic leaders often behave humbly and let others shine in successful situations. This means that charismatic leaders praise their subordinates instead of themselves, and bestow the honour of success on their followers.

As mentioned earlier while presenting the key concepts, charismatic leadership is close to transformational leadership. However, the difference between transformational and charismatic leadership is that charismatic leaders “inspire and excite their employees with the idea that they may be able accomplish great things with extra effort” (Bass 1990, p. 21), while transformational leaders pay more attention to individuals: their duty is

to inspire each individual personally by trying to find the method most suitable for the individual *per se*. Thus, the key differences lie in leaders' depth of concern for their followers: while charismatic leaders inspire and intellectually influence their followers, transformational leaders increase interest through raising awareness of the actual purpose of a given task. They attempt to provide a deeper meaning, inspiring each individual to perform in a superior way in order to achieve their goals. This will benefit the whole organization, not only the team or the specific process. Fiol et al. (1999) nevertheless remark that the differences between these two leadership styles are fewer than the similarities: both types of leader are inspirational, motivate their subordinates and are able to commit followers by providing a clear vision and by connecting with each person individually.

Transactional leadership

Transformational leadership cannot be described without reference to transactional leadership (Burns 1978). Transactional leadership is characterized by the prioritization of results according to the requirements of the organization, without further focus on developing the skills of employees or being a part of the development oneself. A transactional leader often rewards followers for achieving goals with monetary or high-powered material incentives, while a transformational leader praises team members and individuals and helps followers recognize their inner growth rather than relying solely on visible compensation (Bass & Stogdill 1990; Tichy & Devanna 1986).

The transactional leadership style is part of the Full Range Leadership Model and represents an active style of leadership performance, as mentioned in the Introduction (Northouse 2016; Bass & Riggio 2006). However, between non-leadership styles and active leadership styles there also exists transactional leadership that includes components such as management-by-expectations (both passive and active). In the passive version, the leader will intervene only when a problem has occurred and the attainment of a goal might be jeopardized. In the active form, the leader is far too active, controlling everything to prevent any mistakes occurring. The Full Range Leadership Model also includes contingent reward, which is part of transactional leadership when the reward is material (Bass & Riggio 2006; Kirkbride 2000 p. 246; Bass 1985).

Transformational leadership is claimed to contrast with transactional leadership, where the leader emphasizes the existing structure as the most efficient and result driven. However, according to Bass (1999), they should be seen as mutually complementary theories. A leader sometimes needs to perform both styles, even several other styles. These two leadership styles should be thus be adopted on different occasions when needed, although transactional leadership tends to be less effective in terms of the organization's financial results (Rowold & Heinritz 2007; Tichy & Devanna 1986). Avolio, Bass and Jung (1999) also support Bass's claim: in

order to obtain the best results, a leader can or even should display both transformational and transactional leadership.

Nevertheless, Avolio and Bass's (1999) research on the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ), based on Bass's four I's, implies that leaders indeed have either a stronger transactional or transformational profile (Bass & Riggio 2006; Judge & Bono 2000). In addition to this finding, however, Bass and Avolio (1994) specifically point out that a leader needs a combination of leadership styles to respond to the requirements of a changing environment. This is particularly visible in a factory environment, where part of Bass and Avolio's study was conducted. Changing processes requires learning and deep team cohesion; therefore, rewarding in the learning process has been proven to promote the achievement of higher performance (Bass & Avolio 1994), although better leadership results have been gained by using Bass's four I's (Bass & Avolio 1994).

According to Bass and Avolio (1994), transactional leadership occurs when leaders reward followers' performance by indicating that the input was sufficient or when the leader is mainly focused on supervising the organization to ensure the planned performance in order to gain results. One of the features of transactional leadership is that assumptions are made about the kind of performance expected from followers and leaders use reinforcement by materially rewarding performance.

However, what are the specific differences between transformational and transactional leadership? One answer may be that transactional leadership involves contingent material reward and passive and active management-by-expectation leadership styles. The paradigm of transactional leadership is an exchange process where both parties are acquainted with the roles, which are impermanent. When this "bargaining" process is over, both parties are free to leave; they have no higher pursuit to continue. Their only mutual pursuit was the exchange of something the other party desired (Dinh et al. 2014). Thus, transactional leaders commit their followers by rewarding them with extra holidays, praise and material benefits, sometimes including financial rewards (Kirkbride 2006; Bass & Steidlmeier 1999). Such leaders employ by both passive and active management-by-expectation styles. As previously mentioned, in the former, a leader will not intervene in situations before a mistake or problems have occurred. They might also impose a punishment for not completing a task or for making mistakes. In the latter, leaders intervene "too much" by controlling and monitoring their followers in order to prevent mistakes and problems (Kirkbride 2006; Bass & Steidlmeier 1999). As the above demonstrates, in order to recognize the different styles performed in different situations and their reasons and motivations, it is important to understand the Full Range Model of Leadership (Bass & Riggio 2006).

Laissez-faire leadership

Part of full range model of leadership includes also Laissez-faire leadership style, which is part of passive leadership (Chaudhry & Javed 2012; Bass 1999; Den Hartog, Van Muijen & Koopman 1997). These scholars are describing laissez-faire leader as non-active leader, who avoid making decisions, and evades leader's responsibilities. However, according to Chaudhry and Javed (2012) laissez-faire leadership style can be performed if the followers are researchers and highly motivated experts who are self-directed. However, this is seldom the case: a leader performing laissez-faire is considered to be a leader who avoids taking action, does not care or show any interest to her followers, not offering support or giving directions or goals to be reached (Kirkbride 2006; Bass 1999).

2.1.2 What makes leadership transformational

To what extent do personality traits affect a leader's performance? In fact, there is no common understanding on whether a leader's personality traits matter or not. Some leadership researchers believe that a leader's traits have little or no correlation with organizational success (Andersen 2006; Judge et al. 2000; House & Aditya 1997). On the other hand, scholars such as Judge and Bono (2000), Bass and Steidlmeier (1999) and Kirkpatrick and Locke (1991) argue for a correlation but fail to specify its magnitude.

Mischel (1997) observes that personality is usually defined as a style of behaviour or traits, including emotions and thoughts. Indeed, personality is often considered one of the prevailing traits of a person's behaviour (trait theories explain the qualities and personal traits of a leader). Nevertheless, despite the significant amount of research on the trait approach, views on the extent to which personality traits affect a leader's performance remain controversial.

According to Northouse (2016, p. 26), "a consensus has emerged among researchers regarding the basic factors that make up what we call personality". Nevertheless, Northouse (2016) and House and Aditya (1997, p. 410) underline that even though myriad personal characteristics such as "gender, high physical energy and psychological traits, and motives such as intelligence and longing for power and successful performance, [have been] studied and show high correlations to a leader's performance", it has been impossible to replicate these studies. Consequently, a near consensus has developed among the community of leadership scholars that the search for universal traits is futile (House & Aditya 1997). This view is supported by an earlier study by Gibb (1969), who observed that research had failed to isolate a small number of personality traits that determine leadership positions. Gibb's (1969) summary shows that (1) it is impossible to find one specific personality trait that characterizes efficient leaders, and (2) it is impossible to isolate a number of traits which, even combined, explain

efficient leadership. Gibb (1969, p. 227) thus concluded that research had shown no scientific basis for a relationship between traits and leadership positions. Nevertheless, he also claimed that personality traits could not be totally excluded from the study of leadership.

From the perspective of Morton Deutsch (an American social psychologist who is said to be the founding father of conflict resolution), social situations require a certain type of psychological orientation. Moreover, each person varies in their psychological orientation and personality. Depending on their backgrounds and experiences, others appear cooperative and socially emotional in social situations, while others may be competitive, power seeking, and task orientated (Coleman et al. 2014, p. 416).

Kirkpatrick and Locke (1991) argue that there is clear evidence that effective leaders differ from other people. They add that these differences can be presented as the following key factors: 1. drive (achievement, motivation, ambition, energy, tenacity, and initiative), 2. leadership motivation (the desire to lead but not the pursuit of power per se), 3. honesty and integrity, 4. self-confidence (associated with emotional stability), 5. cognitive ability, and 6. knowledge of the business (Kirkpatrick & Locke 1991, p. 48).

By contrast, Judge and Bono (2000, p. 752) write about a broader personality constructs, termed the 'Big Five factors', which are manifested in more specific traits. This "Big five" definition, according to Judge and Bono (2000), was discovered by Tupes and Christal early in the 60's (Tupes & Raymond 1992). The 'Big Five' personality factors are defined as the following (Coleman et al. 2014; Northouse 2016; Judge & Bono 2000): 1. neuroticism, 2. extroversion, 3. openness, 4. agreeableness and 5. conscientiousness. How the 'Big five' are related to transformational leadership and this study is presented below:

1. **Neuroticism.** Such leaders have a tendency to experience unpleasant emotions (Coleman et al. 2014, p. 418) be depressed, insecure, vulnerable and hostile. The leader lacks self-confidence and self-esteem and can panic in emergencies. It is notable that self-esteem is one of the essentials traits of transformational leadership (Bass 1990); thus neuroticism is far removed from transformational leadership (Judge & Bono 2000). Leaders with these traits might find conflicts threatening, and instead of trying to resolve and intervene in them, they try to avoid or reject them (Coleman et al. 2014).
2. **Extroversion.** An extrovert leader has a tendency to be sociable and assertive and is recognized as a warm person with positive energy. A leader with these traits also seeks excitement (Judge & Bono 2000, p. 752). The characteristics of this type of leader also include articulation and emotional expressiveness, which are central traits of charismatic leadership (Bass & Riggio 2006). Due the fact that one of the dimensions of transformational leadership is idealized influence, which can be defined as serving as a charismatic role model, extroversion

is strongly related to transformational leadership. However, in an interpersonal conflict situation, a leader with facets of extraversion might dominate the situation instead of finding a commonly agreed solution.

3. Openness. Here, a leader tends to be informed, creative, insightful, and curious. Typically, leaders with such traits seek intellectual activity and unique experiences. Such leaders accept new ideas and, in addition, are open to fantasy, aesthetics, feelings and values (Coleman et al. 2014, p. 419). A transformational leader also needs to be creative, original and have divergent thinking (Judge & Bono 2000, p. 752). All these characteristics are related to openness. In turn, one of the personality traits of transformational leaders is openness, as, when resolving interpersonal conflicts, open leaders are willing to listen to the other party's points of view and are not afraid of intervening and resolving the conflict (Coleman et al. 2014).
4. Agreeableness. Such leaders tend to be accepting, conforming, trusting, and nurturing (Judge & Bono 2000, p. 752; Coleman et al. 2014). A transformational leader is concerned for her subordinates and treats each person as an individual. This requires empathy (Conger & Kanungo 1987; Bass 1985), and therefore agreeableness is a part of a transformational leader's personality traits.
5. Conscientiousness. Conscientious leaders tend to be organized, controlled, dependable, and decisive. A leader with these traits performs with high self-discipline and requires superior performance (Coleman et al. 2014; Judge & Bono 2000). In an interpersonal conflict situation, such leaders aim to intervene in the interpersonal conflict situation immediately (Coleman et al. 2014).

The Big Five personality factors, especially extraversion, openness and agreeableness, are focal for the leaders investigated by this study. If a leader lacks positive energy and a positive attitude, it is harder to inspire followers; although this trait does not necessarily prevent leaders from being successful. Performing "extroversion" is close to Bass's (1999) inspirational leadership, and enhances leaders' ability to inspire followers. In turn, performing "openness" aids leaders in becoming better connected with followers, which creates trust and helps leaders motivate their followers (Judge & Bono 2000). Agreeable leaders are close to transformational leaders, who take their followers into consideration individually (Bass 1990).

Traits play a significant role in leadership and in this study. However, this study also partly shares the belief presented by Andersen (2006, p. 1078) that a leader's personality is not a viable factor for explaining organizational efficacy, as "management and leadership in formal organizations are not

about possessing special traits. It is about acting". Furthermore, although it may not be a direct factor, it can be argued that drive is a leadership trait with a clear effect on subordinates. Leadership means action; nothing happens if a leader does not take the initiative and act (Avolio et al. 2009). As part of a leader's performance, traits of this nature are displayed, which motivates employees.

In addition to traits, however, there are many things that can be learned, such as how to show consideration for others and how to solve problems effectively (Coleman et al. 2014; Bass 1990). It is also possible to be trained in how to make well-measured decisions, maintain discipline and determination and understand the mind set of followers.

At present, trait theories and a leader's personality are again a focal topic in research (Northouse 2016). In this study, personality is studied in relation to transformational leadership and interpersonal conflicts; therefore, this study relies on Judge and Bono's (2000) Five-Factor Model of Personality.

2.2 Interpersonal Conflicts in The Workplace

The definition of conflict has been developing from the 1960s, when conflicts were seen as a question of value differentiation. Closer to the 1990s, conflicts were defined as including emotions and frustration, and, since the new Millennium, definitions of conflict have increasingly focused on tension (Grant 2016; Coleman et al. 2014; Van de Vliert & Kabanoff 1990; Pondy 1967).

Despite the fact that interpersonal conflicts occur in all organizations, leaders often attempt to avoid participating in interpersonal conflict situations (Jehn 1997; Stone 1995). Leaders seldom intervene in conflict situations voluntarily because interventions to resolve interpersonal conflicts are generally found unpleasant and time consuming (Saeed et al. 2014; Jehn 1997; Wall & Callister 1995). However, despite their inclinations, leaders actually spend a significant amount of time resolving interpersonal conflicts, thus support and guidance are needed (Coleman et al. 2014; Kabanoff 1985; Thomas 1976).

2.2.1 Interpersonal conflict as a process

The term conflict is often used in multiple ways, so it is understandable that the number of alternative definitions is relatively high (Barki & Hartwick 2004). Coleman et al. (2014), Barki and Hartwick (2004), Wall and Callister (1995), and Deutch (1990) explore conflict through themes such as disagreement, negative emotion and interference, which are considered the main characteristics of interpersonal conflicts in general (Jehn 1995; Wall & Callister 1995). Jehn (1995) further underlines the centrality of emotions in conflicts. According to her, emotions play a particular role,

especially in conflicts between individuals: “They define individuals’ subjective interpretation of reality and reactions to current situations” (Jehn 1997). In turn, according to Deutsch, at the core of a conflict is a feeling of injustice: a person involved in an interpersonal conflict situation might feel disrespected as a person and unable to express concerns (Coleman et al. 2014, p. 43).

By contrast, Thomas (1992) describes conflict as the process which begins when the other party discovers that another party’s frustration is beginning to rise. In addition, another influential definition comes from Wall and Callister (1995, p. 517), who state that a conflict is “a process in which one party perceives that its interests are being opposed or negatively affected by another party”. Jehn’s (1995) definition of conflict relies on Wall and Callister’s (1995) definition: a conflict “...typically includes tension, animosity, and annoyance among the members within the group” (Jehn 1995, p. 258). Furthermore, in the approach of De Dreu and Weingart (2003, p. 741), a conflict is seen as a “process resulting from the tension between team members because of real or perceived differences”. Finally, an older definition from Mack and Snyder (1957, p. 212) identifies a conflict as “a particular kind of social interaction process between parties who have mutually exclusive or incompatible values”.

A conflict thus often involves a disagreement about opinions between two or several individuals and feelings of injustice and being disrespected. Indeed, it is doubtful that a conflict could exist if the other party failed to react. Thus, Marks et al. (2001) argue that a conflict is a team process including several individuals, not only one person. A conflict occurs when members who share similar points of view and values create an opposing force to the other team members (or individual) and desire mutual acceptance for their opinion. To overcome this obstacle, a team must find a way to reach the same goal (Tekleab et al. 2009; Jehn 1995). Nevertheless, do these descriptions actually define a conflict itself or do they in fact describe what transpires after a conflict occurs?

According to Barki and Hartwick (2004), empirical studies typically describe a conflict in terms of time, by asking when the conflict occurred, or in terms of the place, by asking where it occurred. Conflict process descriptions, which answer the question “how did the conflict occur?” or explore questions of influence, such as “what happened to the other party?”, are often used as conflict statements. Nevertheless, Barki and Hartwick (2004) criticize definitions that start with such statements for their failure to describe the true nature of a conflict. By contrast, Barki and Hartwick’s (2004, p. 216) own definition of an interpersonal conflict is “a dynamic process that occurs between interdependent parties as they experience negative emotional reactions to perceived disagreements and interference with the attainment of their goals”. Moreover, Kabanoff (1985, p. 113) simply describes conflict as the “result of incompatible expectations among people about their relative influence, their desire to protect valued roles, and to maintain a sense of freedom”.

According to Jehn and Mannix (2001), conflicts can be categorized into three working groups describing the type of conflict: 1. Interpersonal – sometimes called relationship or relational conflicts according to Wall and Callister (1995) and De Dreu and Weingart (2003), 2. Task, and 3. Process. A more detailed explanation is provided below:

1. Interpersonal conflicts occur between individuals who simply disagree on something (Jehn & Mannix 2001). Interpersonal conflicts concern individuals' differences, which create tensions and even enmity between the parties involved (Jehn 1995). A conflict can also be perceived as a personal attack (Jehn 1997, p. 532). Emotions represent the participants' own subjective understanding of reactions to the situation and are often seen to be influenced by stress (Wall & Callister 1995). De Dreu and Weingart (2003) state that interpersonal conflicts include a wide range of subjects, such as personal taste, values, political preferences and opinions. In turn, Tekleab et al. (2009, p. 172) define a relationship conflict as a "socioemotional conflict arising from interpersonal disagreements".
2. Task conflicts occur when there are disagreements about the content of the task. This includes holding dissenting opinions and beliefs. Task conflicts involve arguing about goals and content and the substance of the tasks (Hjerto & Kuvaas 2017; Jit et al. 2016; De Dreu & Weingart 2003; Jehn 1997; Wall & Callister 1995). Tekleab et al. (2009, p. 172) define a task conflict as "a cognitive conflict among team members associated with the task at hand". As previously mentioned, a task conflict occurs when members of the team have different views of a given task and they disagree on its content. Task conflicts refer to everything concerning an organization and its culture and processes, including how tasks should be processed and executed.
3. Finally, process conflicts occur when parties have differing interpretations of processes and how they should be implemented or accomplished in the workplace (Barki & Hartwick 2004; Jehn 1995).

As can be seen from the discussion above, despite the voluminous work on conflicts and the longevity of conflicts as a research topic, a clear, generally accepted definition and typology of the basic concept is still lacking (Wall & Callister 1995). In sum, some scholars view a conflict as purely consisting of disagreements or differences of opinion (e.g. Moore 1998); some see a conflict as interfering or obstructing behaviour (Alper, Tjosvold & Law 2000); others view it as some combination of the above and as a mixture of negative emotions like anxiety, jealousy, frustration and anger (e.g. Jehn 1994; Bodtker & Jameson 2001).

To summarize the concept of conflict, when two individuals or parties (e.g. groups or teams) hold contrasting opinions and disagree without finding a solution to their disagreement, this increases tension, which eventually causes a conflict and impacts emotions. A conflict is an interaction between two parties who feel their opinion has not been given the opportunity to be heard (Coleman et al. 2014). This research adopts a view that combines Jehn's (1997) and Thomas's (1992) perspectives of conflict; both authors claim that conflicts arise from views and opinions which are incompatible between parties or teams and will impact emotions and influence behaviour.

This study, moreover, relies strongly on Jehn and Mannix's (2001) interpersonal conflict theory. Despite the fact that there are different types of conflicts, they always arise from human influence. Thus, the main focus of this study is interpersonal conflicts, and where the word conflict is used, it includes all subtypes of conflict, including interpersonal conflicts. However, there are several theoretical approaches to categorize conflicts. Below is presented six perspectives how conflicts should be categorized and theoretically approached by Lewicki, Weiss and Lewin (1992):

1. The psychological perspective, which focuses on individuals and conflicts between human beings.
2. The sociological perspective, which is related to conflicts within groups in organizations.
3. The economic perspective, which, according to Lewicki et al. (1992, p. 210), involves "applying models of economic rationality to individual decision-making and even to complex social behaviour".
4. The labour relations perspective, which is related to negotiations between labour and employers and is strongly rooted in American labour history.
5. The bargaining and negotiating perspective, which focuses on conflicts from the negotiation perspective in labour and in industrial relations.
6. The third party dispute resolution approach which concerns the effects of using a third party in conflict resolution.

This study primarily relies on the psychological perspective together with the sociological approach. Despite starting from the individuals engaged in a conflict, all interpersonal conflicts must be understood within their organizational settings; i.e. the sociological dimension can be of great importance. The last perspective, third party dispute resolution, is also central to this study. Although Lewicki et al. (1992) focused their research on labour conflicts, the need was primarily same: using a third party (i.e. an external coach) as a major contributor to prevent conflicts and resolve them when they inevitably occur.

In addition, this study also relies on the psychological conflict theory of Morton Deutsch (1990). Deutsch was an American social psychologist and researcher of conflict resolution who described the beginning of the social

psychological period as an era of diverse competition. According to Deutsch (1990), this competition began in the ruins of World War I and the economic depression of the late 1920s and early 1930s, accelerated with the rise of totalitarian systems such as Nazism and Communism, and culminated in the intense competition in business life and between nations seen today. The social psychological approach to conflicts has primarily been influenced by Darwin, Freud and Marx, each in their own fields, who wrote about conflict from a destructive and competitive perspective (Deutsch 1990).

2.2.2 Beneficial and negative conflicts

De Dreu and Weingart (2003) describe the growing tendency in conflict research to distinguish between beneficial and negative conflicts: interpersonal conflicts have a strong negative impact on team cohesion and effectiveness, it also decreases goodwill and collective understanding (De Dreu & Weingart 2003; Jehn 1995; Deutsch 1990), whereas a task conflict can even be beneficial to the team, improve the quality of decisions and strengthen understanding between employees in an organization (Tekleab et al. 2009; De Dreu & Weingart 2003; Lovelace et al. 2001; Amason & Sapienza 1997; Jehn 1997). According to Tekleab et al. (2009), for instance if a team can find a resolution to a task conflict together, the experience might even strengthen group cohesion.

As stated above, task conflicts do not necessarily have a negative impact on team cohesion; i.e. a team can be successful and effective and perform as planned (Tekleab et al. 2009). What is more, Lovelace et al. (2001) even argue that a task conflict can strengthen the team if the conflict is prevented from transforming into an interpersonal conflict between individuals in the team. One may ask how this can be prevented and to be concerned only about “a task”. Deutsch (1990) finds this challenging due the reason that people do deal with their concerns about conflicts differently. Therefore task conflict can be interpreted very personal thus it will become interpersonal.

In fact, despite arguments for a positive impact, most studies indicate that task conflicts often do exert a negative influence on team cohesion and effectiveness (Hjerto & Kuvaas 2017; Jit et al. 2016; Tekleab et al. 2009; De Dreu & Weingart 2003). De Dreu and Weingart’s (2003) own research is in line with the findings of Tekleab et al.’s (2009) in that the authors found no support for the argument that a task conflict could even enhance the quality of decision-making in an organization.

Some scholars, however, including Jehn (1997), Amason and Sapienza (1997), Priem, Harrison and Muir (1995) and Schwenk (1990), argue that conflicts can also be stimulating for organizations because they might touch on hidden issues and reveal important topics which would not otherwise be considered at all. Amason and Sapienza (1997) claim that a cognitive, i.e. task, conflict can even improve strategic decision-making, because top management needs to carefully evaluate different perspectives and

options before decisions are taken. In turn, Priem et al. (1995) suggest that a cognitive conflict will “strengthen group consensus” and “increase member satisfaction with the group” (Priem et al. 1995, p. 691). In addition, Ensley, Pearson and Amason (2002) and Sullivan and Feltz (2001), in a study on 62 male hockey players, also found that task-related conflicts can have a generally positive influence on in-group cohesion.

These claims can be better understood by comparing such task conflicts to a situation in which everybody is “fighting against a common enemy”. Resolving a task conflict is like “triumphing” over something “bad” together, which strengthens team cohesion (Jehn 1997; Deutch 2009). Simons and Peterson (2000) strongly suggest that teams, which have gone through the task conflict process tend to be better able to make more accurate decisions because the team possesses a better cognitive understanding of how to reach goals. Simons and Peterson’s study (2000) is in line with other scholars (Ensley et al. 2002; Sullivan & Feltz 2001) who state that conflicts might occasionally have a positive impact. On the other hand, however, the positive impact seems to occur only after a task conflict has been resolved, when the team might even find a stronger team spirit and feeling of unity (Ensley et al. 2002). However, it should be noted that Sullivan and Feltz’s (2001) research concerned a selected group of male hockey players, i.e. a highly particular group in a very specific industry setting. Therefore, its conclusions should be approached with some caution. Moreover, scholars such as Tekleab et al. (2009) have failed to find support for the positive impact of task conflicts (Tekleab et al. 2009; see also De Dreu & Weingart 2003).

When De Dreu and Weingart (2003) performed a meta-analysis of the relationship between task and interpersonal conflicts and team performance, their results were fairly consistent with past theories on the strong negative impact of interpersonal conflicts on team cohesion and, consequently, team performance. However, De Dreu and Weingart (2003) also found that – in contrast to previous academic research – task conflicts often also have a negative impact on team performance. It can be said that conflicts decrease team effectiveness (Hjerto & Kuvaas 2017; Tekleab et al. 2009; Doucet et al. 2009; De Dreu & Weingart 2003; Kabanoff 1985). It is therefore important to try to prevent the conflicts to occur, despite the specific type of the conflict, and solving interpersonal conflicts is a pivotal skill for leaders.

It can be asked, is it necessarily the leader who must play the key role in solving interpersonal conflicts, or should there be a third party involved? It is widely agreed (Hunter et al. 2011; Kotlyar, Karakowsky & Ng 2011) that leadership behaviour (such as performing Bass’ four I’s: idealized influence, inspirational motivation intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration) has a strong influence on team performance, mostly in a positive way. Consequently, it is logical to assume that a successful leader should also be capable of effectively solving conflicts. Indeed, Bass and Riggio (2006) assert that conflict management represents a central part of leadership.

2.2.3 Causes and effects of conflicts

When a conflict occurs, it usually involves parties who have disagreed over some issue, which can be simple or complex, insignificant or meaningful. Nevertheless, a typical factor that contributes to a conflict is a high level of complexity, which is “more likely to generate misunderstanding, to tap divergent interests or unearth dissimilar goals” (Wall & Callister 1995, p. 522). Thus, to resolve conflicts, the “issues” should be divided into smaller units. Moreover, according to the authors, while some characteristics may lead to a resolution, they may also generate further conflicts involving strong emotion, which will not be easily reconcilable. Larger conflicts have the same tendency to evolve in this way: the parties become strongly emotionally bonded, which makes deal-making challenging (Wall & Callister 1995).

It is worth noting that everybody has experienced mistrust, low communication or another person's poor behaviour when attempting to reach a goal, and all these issues can cause a conflict. What is more, the other person's previous interactions may give rise to the conflict: A person can never know exactly what will trigger a conflict when meeting a new person with her own background and experiences (Coleman et al. 2014). However, can a leader's personality traits generate conflicts? According to Wall and Callister (1995) and Doucet et al. (2009), a leader's personality can indeed sometimes be the reason for a conflict. For instance, being introvert or neurotic might have a stronger negative impact on the other party's reaction and interpretations than being more extrovert and open (Coleman et al. 2014). Although Wall and Blum (1991) claim that personality is of secondary relevance in conflict creation, Baron (1989) claims that individuals (type A) who are “low-self monitor” display a higher frequency of conflict with followers than those who are (type B) “high self-monitor”. Type B individuals are considered capable of collaboration and prefer avoid conflicts. Baron's study is on line with Wall and Callister's assertion that personality has an impact in conflict creation.

According to Deutsch (1990) and Kabanoff (1985), the effects of conflict can be myriad. Deutsch (1990) claims that responses to conflict can be anger, aggression, rebellious behaviour and even sabotage. In turn, Kabanoff (1985) underlines the importance of finding explanations for the causes of conflict in order to effectively manage conflict situations. Moreover, Wall and Callister (1995) state that the effects of conflicts can be categorized as the following: 1. effects on individuals, 2. effects on interpersonal relationships, 3. effects on communication, 4. effects on behaviour, 5. effects on structure, 6. effects on previous interactions, and 7. effects on issues. According to Wall and Callister (1995, p. 518), seven different factors potentially cause a conflict and give rise to the effects such conflicts will have for a person. These factors are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Causes and effects of conflicts by Wall and Callister (1995)

| Cause of conflicts | | Effects of conflicts |
|--------------------|---|--|
| 1. | Individual Characteristics: When individuals' level of aspiration is high and they are highly committed to achieving their goals, they are more likely to trigger a conflict. | Anger, hostility, frustration, tension, stress, feelings of guilt, exhilaration, low job satisfaction, reduced motivation and productivity, loss of face/embarrassment. |
| 2. | Perceptual Interface: (distrusting each other): there is the perception that the other party has high goals and achieving them will be costly to one's own goals | Distrust, misunderstandings, perceiving the other's behaviour as harmful, inability to see the other's perspective, questioning of the other's intentions, changed attitude towards the other, changes in relative amounts of power. |
| 3. | Communications: both low communication, i.e. too little knowledge, and extensive communication might cause conflicts due to misunderstanding. | Changes in the quality of communication. Changes in the amount of communication taking place. |
| 4. | Behaviour: belittling another person or blocking that person's goals or aspirations causes conflict. | Avoiding the other, trying to save face, emotional venting, threat-coerciveness, aggression, physical force, harm/injury, resignation or dismissal, absenteeism, biased or selective perceptions, simplified, stereotyped, black/white or zero-sum thinking, discounting or augmenting of information, deindividualization or demonizing others, shortened time perspective, fundamental attribution error, increased commitment to position, creativity, challenge to status quo, greater awareness of problem, personal development, learning. |
| 5. | Structure: The closer people are, more comfortable they feel raising difficult issues, which may lead to a conflict. | Leadership shift to authoritarian when threatened, increased focus on activities and less on individual satisfaction, enhanced in-group loyalty and cohesiveness, discrimination against out-group, contentious group goals, increased motivation and performance within each group, reduced interdependence or cooperation, stability can increase or decrease. |
| 6. | Previous Interactions: Previous experiences can influence the present and cause a conflict. | |
| 7. | Issues: More numerous and complex issues cause a conflict. | Increase in the number of issues, clouding, becoming matters of principle, linkage of issues of increasing complexity. |

2.2.4 Role of leadership in conflict management

Conflict management is a set of actions aimed at reducing the occurrence of conflicts in an organization and finding a resolution to pre-existing disputes (De Dreu & Weingart 2003; Wall & Callister 1995). However, how should emerging conflicts be managed and resolved in an organization, and what should be done to avoid conflicts overall?

It is well-known that conflicts should not be left unresolved (Hjerto & Kuvaas 2017; Tekleab et al. 2009), and according to several scholars (Doucet et al. 2009; Lovelace et al. 2001; Wall & Callister 1995; Van De Vliert & Kabanoff 1990), top managers can influence conflicts in both positive and negative ways; i.e. a leader can intervene and help resolve conflict situations or adopt a “laissez-faire” leadership style and refrain from intervening in interpersonal conflicts. In addition, a leader can be the cause of the conflict

or a party to it. Moreover, conflicts between incompetent leaders and skilled subordinates can even have more positive outcomes than when the leader is highly skilled, as the leader's inability to prevent the dispute from being resolved immediately can provide more time to help find the optimum solution (Kabanoff 1985).

Doucet et al. (2009) argue that a leader can be involved in a conflict in three different ways:

1. **Direct Involvement.** If the leader is directly involved in a conflict, the leader's own conflict management style will have an impact on the solution. This management style can include avoidance, confrontation, and collaboration.
2. **Intervention.** The leader may need to intervene in a conflict between subordinates and help the parties involved find a way out of the conflict situation.
3. **Through leadership style.** Through their own leadership style, leaders can have an impact on conflict development. The leadership style performed by the leader has either a beneficial or negative influence on the resolution of the conflict.

The team itself plays a crucial role in creating the conflict resolution process (Jehn 1995). This process is vital and should be managed by someone who has thus far been uninvolved in the process. Jehn calls for a third party who can intervene in the situation without bias. This third party, according to Wall and Callister (1995), can be a team leader or someone from the organization's top management or human resource department (Dion 2000; Wall & Callister 1995). However, differing views exist about whether and when external intervention is needed to solve interpersonal conflicts.

Lovelace et al. (2001) argue that a leader can actually escalate a conflict from a task conflict to a relationship conflict by her own leadership style. In turn, Doucet et al. (2009) state that leadership plays a pivotal role in conflict management. In their research, Doucet et al. (2009), argue that the most effective way of managing conflicts is to prevent them from occurring by creating a collective vision for the organization. By acting according to that vision, leaders thus become "role models" for their followers. Bass (1990) and Doucet et al. (2009) also found that a leader should take followers' individual needs into consideration to prevent conflict situations from increasing. These conclusions are in line with Jehn's (1997) and Mareschal's (2005) studies, which posit that the more conflict parties are heard, the more they feel respected, will reducing the number of subsequent conflicts, which makes it easier to introduce the conciliations to the conflict parties.

Tekleab et al. (2009) in turn suggest that if a relationship conflict occurs, the team should receive guidance and support to resolve the conflict, while a team tackling a task conflict should be allowed to manage their disagreements by themselves. Thus, only in the event of relationship problems, i.e. an interpersonal conflict, should a third party be involved in helping the parties resolve the conflict.

Concrete techniques for managing conflicts

Coleman et al. (2014) provide clear guidelines for how to proceed in a conflict situation. These involve setting up mediation, identifying the issues, facilitating and problem solving, and finally reaching agreement (Coleman et al. 2014, p. 869). Furthermore, Wall and Callister (1995, p. 549) offer seven different suggestions for leaders when proceeding in the conflict situation:

1. Do not allow a conflict to build. The leadership style should enhance followers' trust, thereby allowing different opinions to be discussed immediately.
2. A conflict avoided from the beginning is better than a conflict managed. A conflict will always leave a mark.
3. By the time it is identified, a conflict has probably proceeded so far that rectifying the original cause may no longer be sufficient. The longer the conflict remains unresolved, the more issues there will be to tackle, because other stimuli will have already developed to increase the original conflict.
4. If the issues can be identified, reduce them to a salient, manageable set. Then, attempt to set up trades in which each side concedes on issues with low costs for them and relatively high payoffs for the opponent. It is important for both parties to "save face"; i.e. both conflict parties experience the feeling of being right and capable of making concessions.
5. Adopt a paradigm approach. Try some techniques that seem reasonable. Look for structural modifications rather than putting the blame on people and their relationships. In this approach it is important to attempt to lead the parties to the conclusion that the problem is in an external circumstance that has negatively affected them.
6. Avoid the tendency to fixate on conflict and its resolutions. Disputants value procedural justice perhaps as much as the dispute resolution. It is pivotal to remember the importance of showing that both parties have been heard, that both parties' opinions have been taken into consideration, irrespective of the resolution.
7. Conflict management is a skill that can be taught and developed. Every leader should be taught how to approach and resolve conflict situations and support the parties involved.

Van De Vliert and Kabanoff (1990) present five styles of conflict management based on Blake and Mouton's grid (1964; 1970): 1. avoiding, 2. accommodating, 3. compromising, 4. competing, and 5. collaborating.

Transformational leadership in resolving conflicts

Leaders who perform in a transformational leadership way can reduce interpersonal conflicts by challenging their followers to be innovative problem solvers and supporting their development by coaching and mentoring (Bass & Riggio 2006; Kotlyar & Karakowski 2011). Zhang et al. (2011) argue that a transformational leader who ensures an inspirational working environment, supports the team spirit, sets common goals and enhances a mutual vision is a leader who can guide their team to jointly approach the conflict. These scholars assert that transformational leaders encourage team members to solve conflicts by using methods which benefit the whole team instead of adopting “win-lose” approaches, i.e. competitive conflict, where the parties involved think that the opposing party’s success in achieving a goal will prevent them from being successful (Coleman et al. 2014). In other words, a transformational leaders’ way of encouraging followers when managing team conflicts has an impact on coordination and team performance. It should be noted, however, that here leaders are not personally involved in solving conflicts; rather, the beneficial effect is due to their supporting the team to create shared values and norms which are advantageous for swift and efficient conflict resolution.

Scholars like Zhang et al. (2011) further argue that success in applying the cooperative conflict management approach requires not only open communication among team members, but also the willingness to take the opinions of others into consideration. Open discussions reduce tension between team members and help develop mutual trust. This, in turn, helps team members learn from each other’s experiences, develop and find the best and most effective settlements.

One of the key elements of transformational leadership in solving conflicts is communication; Leaders should communicate clearly, staying in topics and not allow followers blame each other in any circumstances (Lehmann-Willenbrock et al. 2015).

2.3 Coaching

“In the context of the concepts provided earlier, executive coaching is defined as a helping relationship formed between a client who has managerial authority and responsibility in an organization and a consultant who uses a wide variety of behavioural techniques and methods to help the client achieve a mutually identified set of goals to improve his or her professional performance and personal satisfaction and, consequently, to improve the effectiveness of the client’s organization within a formally defined coaching agreement.”

- Kilburg (1996, p. 142) -

Since the 1990s, when it is claimed to have emerged, the use of executive coaching in organizations has greatly increased (Jones & Brinkert 2008; Berglas 2002; Feldman & Lankau 2005). Feldman and Lankau (2005) observe that coaching initially focused specifically on middle- and senior-level managers, with the aim of changing their behaviour. The rationale for this specific target group was clear: According to Feldman and Lankau (2005) senior executives were blamed for possessing poor leadership skills. This lack of leadership skills, rather than the absence of technical expertise, was estimated to account for failure rates as high as 50 per cent among senior executives in corporate America. External consultants were thus asked to offer guidance and help, and the executive coaching business began to grow in the US, with other countries soon following suit.

2.3.1 Defining coaching

The word coach has its roots in the word ‘carriage’², which arose in the 1550s to refer to a covered vehicle with four wheels. By contrast, the concept of a coach as an instructor or a trainer first appeared around 1830 in Oxford, when it was used as a slang word for tutors, who “carried” a student through an exam.

Coaching has its roots in the humanistic traditions of psychology, and coaching history clearly supports the development of the positive psychology movement, as Grant (2006) states. Anthony M. Grant is a highly respected coaching psychologist and director of the world’s first Coaching Psychology Unit at the School of Psychology, Sydney University, Australia. His doctoral study (*Towards a psychology of coaching: The impact of coaching on meta-cognition, mental health and goal attainment*, Grant 2001) is said to be one of only a handful of doctoral theses that explicitly examine coaching psychology. In this work, Grant claims that a “combined cognitive and behavioural coaching program is an effective means of enhancing both performance and well-being” (Grant 2001, p. 147).

Because the history of coaching relies heavily on positive psychology, one of its dominant influences is Maslow’s seminal concept of the psychological hierarchy of needs (Coleman et al. 2014; Grant 2006). In his ground-breaking paper “A Theory of Human Motivation”, Maslow (1943) described human development as stages of growth. Maslow (1943) portrayed these stages as his famous pyramid, familiar to many from their days at upper-secondary school.

At the bottom of the pyramid are basic, primary physical needs, such as hunger and tiredness, while spiritual needs and the need for self-actualization are found at the top of the pyramid. To be able to grow further and progress to the “next level” from the basics to self-actualization, a person is required

2 <https://www.etymonline.com/word/coach>

to fulfil the needs of the preceding stage. If that person is incapable of accomplishing the needs of the current level, moving to the next level is unachievable. Consequently, Maslow's hierarchy of needs is highly relevant for understanding coachees and their difficulties in changing their behaviour.

Maslow (1943) launched positive psychology because he realized that traditional psychology dealt only with the negative aspects of the human condition, such as ailments, diseases and mental illness. This view is echoed by Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2014), who state that psychologists should use the very same techniques and tools to understand human beings' strengths as they do to understand illnesses and dysfunctionalities (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi 2014). In other words, as Gallagher and Lopez (2009, p. 3) write, "positive psychologists answer hard questions about [the] best in people".

To continue building on this, one more definition of coaching focuses on improving coachee or team performance as a specific competence, usually over a relatively short period of time (Garvey, Stokes & Megginson 2009; Megginson & Clutterbuck 2008). In turn, Fielman and Lankau's (2005, p. 829) define coaching as "a short- to medium-term relationship between an executive and a consultant with the purpose of improving an executive's work effectiveness". However, is such coaching really effective?

The intention of an executive coach is to support leaders to change their behaviour, perform more effectively and understand interpersonal experiences better. In general, the aim is to coach the leader to be able to improve well-being for the whole organisation (Gregory, Beck & Carr 2011; Nelson & Hogan 2009; Grant 2009). Moreover, a professional coach should be able to question everything and accept being unpopular, as change something sometimes requires the discussion of subjects and issues that do not make the coachee feel entirely successful and liked (Goldsmith 2009). According to the existing literature, coaching methods have evolved from management-performance-centric coaching to an approach, which focuses on both organizational performance and well-being (Grant 2016; McKee et al. 2009). This is a method in which organizational culture is nurtured by high-quality conversations and the leader is capable of listening to and understanding her followers and guiding them towards improved performance.

Since the 1990s, coaching has become a means for executives to gain better results (Garvey et al. 2009; Grant et al. 2009; Feldman & Lankau 2005). It has become a way of receiving support for increasing corporate productivity and an instrument for nurturing the organization in general. According to the above-mentioned scholars, it seems like all self-respecting US executives ensure that they are using a coach to achieve superior performance. The Sherpa Coaching Survey began in 2016, and has demonstrated that coaching has increased by 40 percent since 2012. Coaching as research interest for academics has also increased; however, despite the newly found statistics of how coaching has increased during the past 6 years, coaching studies have been made to an increasing extent over the last 40 years.

Grant (2016) divides the coaching research literature of recent decades into three periods: 1. the 1990s generation of coaching, which focused on performance management, 2. the millennial generation of coaching, which concentrated on the role of leaders as coaches, and 3. the 21st century generation of coaching, which focuses on enhancing both leader behaviour and performance methods, and also on promoting the well-being of every person in a sustainable and individually meaningful way.

In 2009, The British Psychological Society and its Special Group in Coaching Psychology published a special edition focusing on coaching and leadership, in which the world's leading researchers, theorists and practitioners from Europe, the US and Australia presented a wide collection of papers on leadership coaching.³

The articles reflected the main concerns and challenges of coaching in general, calling for more developed skills and understanding of coaching psychology (Palmer & Cavanagh 2009), and exploring the relationship between positive psychology and coaching.

Other topics which are gaining ever more interest in the diverse field of coaching research include functional and dysfunctional personalities, meaning for instance individuals with difficulties in tolerating strong emotions, leaders who are sceptical, who might fear criticism, and distrust authority. Nelson and Hogan (2009) are calling these types of leaders having "dark side characteristics", individuals, who even "prefer social isolation" (Nelson & Hogan 2009, p. 11).

Moreover, as leaders, dysfunctional personalities often lack comprehension of their own roles and influence in conflict situations. In his study, Higgs (2009) claimed that our society contains an increasing number of dysfunctional leaders who not only reduce the performance of their organizations but also decrease well-being in the workplace among members of their teams. Dysfunctional leader is also a topic of increasing concern among leadership scholars (Nelson & Hogan 2009; Dulewicz & Higgs 2005).

What is more, there are many sub-themes in the academic discourse about coaching. One of them, particularly after 2010, has focused on the differences between coaching and mentoring. Consequently, debate abounds in the literature on the definition of coaching and mentoring and differences between them (Garvey et al. 2009; Grant et al. 2009; Feldman & Lankau 2005). While it may seem that no significant differences exist between mentoring and coaching in general, according to some scholars, mentoring and coaching are inherently different: mentoring refers to recognizing and strengthening the potential of an individual, while coaching aims to improve that individual's performance in a specific issue, such as team work, conflict management or a certain process (Serrat 2014; Grant et al. 2009).

3 <http://www.worldwidecoachingmagazine.com/coaching-worldwide-state-industry/>

In mentoring, the goals can change during the mentoring period according to the needs and the development of the person being mentored, which usually takes a much longer period of time than in coaching. Mentors support their mentee to develop their inner self through discussions and the mentor's own experiences and narratives from those experiences (Grant et al. 2009; Megginson & Clutterbuck 2008). In coaching, on the other hand, a person is in need of immediate help and support for managing a certain issue or solving a specific problem in a particular time window, although the transformation process of the coachee can also take a long period of time (Grant 2006). In turn, according to Megginson and Clutterbuck (1995, p. 13), "...mentoring is off-line help by one person to another in making significant transitions in knowledge, work or thinking".

2.3.2 Coachee learning

Leadership involves a path of long-term development (Northouse 2016; Robertson 2004). Leaders gain more experience and expertise during the years, and this experience will become knowledge, skills and the ability to lead after reflecting, gaining self-awareness, solving problems, awakening, being aware, transforming and developing together with others. In answer to the question of whether a leader is capable of learning everything by herself alone, Robertson (2004, p. 2) writes that "the process of coaching with a peer partner is paramount to the continued learning of effective leadership practice". To be able to learn how to lead, a leader naturally needs people to lead. What is more, a leader can also obtain help and support from outsiders who will challenge the leader in her own development process. As Robertson (2004, p. 2) puts it, a "coaching partner, in a similar position and role, is well-placed to be able to provide both of these elements [i.e. support and challenge] to a professional colleague. It is part of the ideal of professionalism". Here, a peer coach is able to offer these elements by helping the leader develop self-awareness, perform more effectively and change her behaviour. To gain a more complete understanding of the coaching process and the behaviour of the coachee, it is essential to examine briefly the science of learning processes in more detail. Jerome Bruner (1957), one of the best-known American psychologists, whose lifelong work contributed to human cognitive psychology and learning theory, saw learning as an active process. Bruner's (1957) ground-breaking contention was that a person learns when she creates new ideas based on her past and when she is capable of processing new information and merging it with old knowledge. Bruner famously described learning as a "coding" process in which previous knowledge is enlarged by building new knowledge on top of it.

In contrast, the behaviourist Burrhus F. Skinner (1968), a renowned American social philosopher, argued that learning generally occurs when a person is engaged in activities, which either strengthen or weaken her ideas about the kind of behaviours that are suitable in a given situation.

The 'correct' action or behaviour is consequently reinforced, leading to strengthened learning (Skinner 1968). In his book *Technology of Teaching*, Skinner (1968, p. 23) describes teaching and learning processes as follows:

The learning process is followed in curves of acquisition. The teacher plays the active role of transmitter. He shares his experiences. He gives and the student takes. The energetic student grasps the structure of facts or ideas. If he is less active, the teacher impresses facts upon him, or drills ideas into him, or inculcates good taste or a love of learning.

The distinguishing elements in the above-mentioned theories are the principles of learning: Bruner believed that an individual needed to be educated in order to build on previously learned information, while Skinner believed that an individual could not learn if she was unable to practice the new lessons repeatedly. Bruner also stressed the importance of a teacher who can "convey" information to the learner on different subjects. By contrast, Skinner underlined the teacher's role as a guide who directs her pupils to learn by doing. Skinner also introduced the novel concept of 'reinforcement', which refers to behaviour that is repeated if reinforced but repressed if not reinforced.

The constructivist approach to learning created by Bruner (1957) posits that learning involves creating one's own knowledge by organizing various forms of information. This should be achieved through an individual's own 'coding system'. Moreover, in order for the coding system to be sufficiently effective, it should not be explicitly taught by an external teacher; rather, it should be created by the learner herself. In other words, knowledge is built through a learning process involving self-invention. Therefore, the role of a teacher is to support students on their path of individual experience and discovery instead of instructing them as to what learnings are wrong and right. Instead, the student should discover this by herself.

By contrast, Skinner (1968) argued that in this kind of learning process, core information can be misunderstood when the teacher fails to correct or guide. Students should be told where to search for information and how to use it so as to integrate it into existing knowledge and begin to develop it. Only then will new ways of acting become automatic.

Coaching involves teaching someone to learn something, although executive coaches often deliberately avoid using the term 'teaching' in their parlance. The task of the coach is to support the transformation process of a leader (Garvey et al. 2009), and the main focus in the coaching process is changing the coachee's thinking and behaviour to improve everyday life by learning.

The ideal role of the teacher differs considerably in the previous two examples of learning theories: from Skinner's behaviouristic perspective, the teacher should be more active and the learner more passive. Nevertheless, the student should also act and test her knowledge in practice after acquiring information. Furthermore, Skinner also believed strongly in 'learning by

doing'. By contrast, in Bruner's (1957) cognitivism, the teacher is more like a supporter and an observer, a master who creates learning opportunities but does not reveal what is right or wrong. In terms of coaching, the coachee needs to process the new information received from a coach and engage in new behaviours to be capable of performing in a novel way. Thus, to be able to support my coachees, my own coaching leans on both Bruner's (1957) and Skinner's (1968) theories.

2.3.3 Effectiveness of coaching

The coaching literature has long called for evidence on whether coaching has a real impact on efficiency and improvement of leadership and team behaviour and performance (Gregory et al. 2011; Kilburg 1996). Nevertheless, several researchers recognize the importance of coaching. For instance, Goldsmith (2009) writes unambiguously about the positive impact of coaching on a leader's behaviour. Moreover, Grant et al. (2009) indicate that even short-term coaching – as brief a period as 10 weeks – has a positive impact on the way leaders perform their own role as leaders. Moreover, they also suggest that coaching has a positive impact on the self-awareness and self-control of coachees. More importantly, their findings also show that a leader's stress level can be significantly reduced by even short-term coaching. Grant et al.'s (2009) study was conducted in a major Australian public-healthcare service agency, where 41 individuals were coached during a period of only eight to 10 weeks. The coaching programme included a 360-degree feedback survey to begin the coaching process and continued with a half-day leadership development workshop, which was followed by executive coaching sessions (four in total). After the coaching period, the authors claimed to have detected a significant decrease in stress levels, while workplace well-being had increased (Grant et al. 2009).

Ladegård (2011) nevertheless contests the findings of Grant et al. (2009), arguing that it was enhanced stress-management skills rather than coaching which had an impact on stress reduction. By contrast, Feldman and Lankau (2005) present several coaching examples where self-awareness had increased, a leader's behaviour had changed and effectiveness or performance had improved. However, these scholars also argue that only a small number of studies prior to 2005 have empirically demonstrated the outcomes of coaching, and even then the outcomes are described rather imprecisely.

Feldman and Lankau also call for more research into the effectiveness of coaching using reliable and valid measurements, such as pre- and post-designs that measure client performance before and after coaching (Feldman & Lankau 2005, p. 843). The authors also suggest that control groups be used to validate the results. Many researchers share the same opinion; for instance, Goldsmith (2009) and Grant et al. (2009) also call for ways of measuring successful coaching processes.

Gregory et al. (2011) approach the question of the effectiveness of executive coaching by providing what they call a Control Theory (CT) framework. The CT framework has two relevant elements, goals and feedback. In Control Theory, the leaders control their own performance by asking for feedback from their followers and team members. After receiving feedback, they self-regulate and change their behaviour accordingly in order to achieve mutually agreed goals. This sounds simple, but the complexity of human behaviour nevertheless makes it a challenging task (Gregory et al. 2011). Furthermore, feedback and self-regulation can also increase or decrease the attainment of mutually agreed goals. Additionally, the pursuit of these goals requires leaders to self-evaluate their performance and control their behaviour. However, to evaluate their behaviour in the first place, leaders require feedback from their followers or team members.

Kilburg (1996) claim that the core of effective executive coaching always involves a “mutually identified set of goals” (Kilburg 1996, p. 142). Smither and Reilly (2001) concur with Kilburg (1996), claiming that the core elements of effective coaching are goal setting and developmental planning. Moreover, goal setting plays a key role in coaching when top managers seek help to enhance or develop specific issues, such as a) building specific skills, b) processing specific projects, c) developing their career, d) solving specific problems, e) brainstorming, f) overcoming conflicts and g) motivating staff (Eaton & Johnson 2001).

2.3.4 The role of a coach

Gregory et al. (2011) and Grant et al. (2009) both underline the importance of an external coach, as, according to them, an external executive coach is fundamental for increasing the effectiveness of the coachee. In turn, Palmer and Cavanagh (2009) demand innovative and daring leadership, which also affects the requirements of coaching. These authors call for coaches who constantly find new opportunities to educate themselves in order to perform better with their coachees. Coaches must thus continually enhance their understanding and develop their skills and coaching psychology (Palmer & Cavanagh 2009; Kilburg 1996).

Despite scholarly acknowledgement that a coach plays a central role in a leader’s self-development, the definition of a coach and coaching methods nevertheless remains vague. According to Feldman and Lankau (2005) and Berglas (2002), almost anybody can call themselves a ‘coach’, even with very little experience or education. By contrast, the results of two surveys by Judge and Cowell (1997) and Gale et al. (2002) on the educational backgrounds of executive coaches demonstrated that coaches were mature individuals with abundant experience. From the 60 executive coaches in their study, Judge and Cowell (1997) found that 80 per cent were between 35 and 55 years old, 90 per cent held Master’s degrees (or higher) in business or social sciences and 45 per cent held Ph.Ds.

Interestingly, from an analysis of 72 articles (including articles both in academic publications and popular magazines) Garman et al. (2000) discovered that less than one third of executive coaches reported having been educated in psychology. In their study, however, Feldman and Lankau (2005) question the centrality or relevance of the coach's background, pointing to the lack of research methods and empirical tests for proving its importance.

Nevertheless, a non-professional coach without experience can prove damaging to the coachee. Moreover, there are risks associated with creating a coaching relationship with a person who is assigned to be coached but fails to see the relevance of coaching. Furthermore, beginning coaching without prior knowledge of the coachee's potential personal disturbances or dysfunctional relationships might give rise to a negative coaching process in which the goals can never be achieved (Nelson & Hogan 2009; Berglas 2002; Scandura 1998). In addition, coaching outcomes are difficult to measure, and the presence of a coachee who is, from the beginning, unwilling to participate in the coaching process is unlikely to facilitate the achievement of any sort of results.

Grant et al. (2009) and Goldsmith (2009) agree that setting goals for coaching in an organization is a far from straightforward task. Goals which are externally imposed and not self-set may significantly reduce coachee engagement. By contrast, commitment to goals is higher when the participants are strongly involved and have the opportunity to influence goal setting. Grant et al. (2009) also recommend broadly defining goals, which are agreed on by board members and other key stakeholders, while avoiding being overly specific, thereby allowing them to be adjusted later by the coachee in order to sustain her commitment (Grant et al. 2009). If the goals are too high and it is apparent to the coachee that they are too challenging, she is unlikely to be inspired, and the entire transformational process might even become jeopardized. This is why goal setting should be taken into account during the coaching process in order to achieve enduring results (Goldsmith 2009). Furthermore, there is a risk that an ambitious coach might be over-manipulative in goal setting.

Goal setting is one of the main topics in the academic coaching literature (Goldsmith 2009; Clutterbuck 2008; Bowles et al. 2007). Here, salient questions include how reliable the results are if the target group has been unwilling to commit to the tasks and goals of the coaching process and how the effectiveness of coaching can be measured? The coach should thus begin the whole coaching process by assessing the relevance of the goals. These goals should also be shared with stakeholders, such as followers, in order to help them commit to the process and support their achievement.

2.4 Research Framework

This chapter presents the research framework (Figure 1) of this study, anchoring coaching, transformational leadership, and interpersonal conflict theories in the literature review presented in earlier chapter 2.0 Theoretical framework.

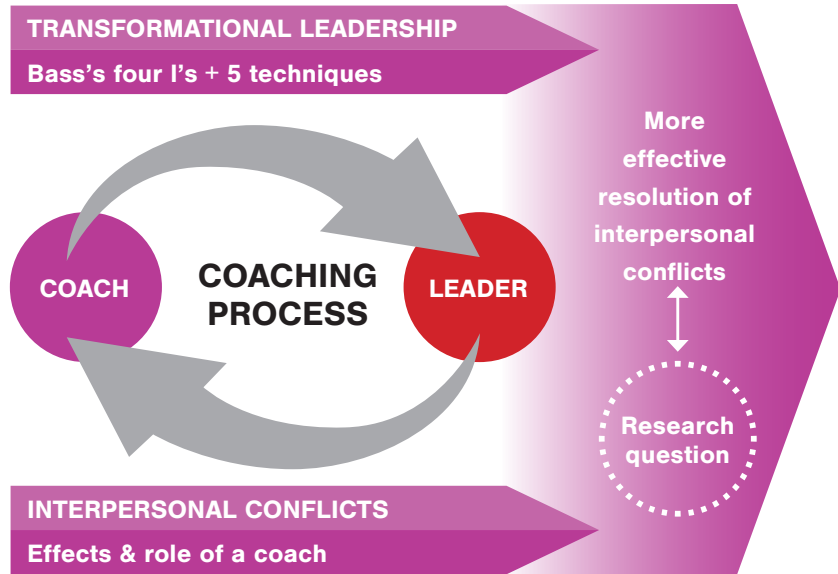


Figure 1. Research framework

The key concept of this study is transformational leadership based on Bernard Bass's transformational leadership theory (Avolio 2011; Bass & Riggio 2006; Bass 1990), which is why Bass appears in the arrow at the top of Figure 1. As mentioned earlier, transformational leadership is performed when a leader holds high ethical and moral standards and is able to provide a clear vision, understand each employee individually and challenge followers to research the given goals (Bass & Riggio 2006; Bass 1990). To better understand the concepts related to this study, the elements of Figure 1 are described individually below:

1. Transformational leadership is the central premise when beginning to define the personalities of leaders and their leadership styles. The arrow of transformational leadership, part of the Full Range Leadership Model, which includes passive leadership styles such as laissez-faire and more active leadership styles like transactional leadership, and even the most active leadership styles, like transformational leadership (Northouse 2016), comes from the left, implying that transformational leadership is the primary theory used in this research. Several scholars have emphasized the relationship between transformational leadership and managing

conflicts (Saeed et al. 2014; Doucet et al. 2009), therefore transformational leadership is one of the main leadership styles to be taught when coaching.

In transformational leadership, the most central factors are Bass's Four I's (Bass & Riggio 2006; Bass 1990), as also mentioned in earlier sections. These factors – individualized consideration, intellectual stimulation, inspirational motivation and idealized influence – are used to explain leaders' performance and personal traits. These are also key factors in determining my perspective when trying to understand a leader's way of leading and when reflecting on changes in the leader. These factors also strongly determine how I interpret my own interaction as a coach.

2. Coaching

When describing the coaching process, the literature often focuses on how to begin coaching, what kind of questions should be posed to reveal leaders' own understanding of their identity (self-understanding), what goals are to be set in the early stages of the coaching process, and more importantly, how to implement them and evaluate progress. These questions correspond to the stages of the coaching process, which scholars such as Grant (2016; 2009), Feldman and Lankau (2005), and Goldsmith (2009; 2004) list as 1. writing a contract, 2. setting the mutually agreed central aspects of the goals in order to achieve the desired results and development, 3. confidential one-to-one interviews, 4. discussions and reflections 5. involving followers/ other parties in coaching to support achievement of the goals, and 6. evaluating the results and outcomes. In addition, the coaching literature also includes instructions on how to conduct interviews, how to make daily/ weekly updates, and how to conduct group conversations and mediation sessions if needed. However, the complexity of coaching is easily forgotten. Scholars like Goldsmith (2009; 2004) tend to present coaching as a linear process, which it is not. As a process, coaching has a beginning and an end, but it will never conform to the pre-agreed direction, as the development of the coachee and the organization cannot be predicted beforehand.

The coaching theories of Grant (2009; 2015), and Feldman and Lankau (2005) acknowledge this complexity. For instance, some of the key outcomes of executive coaching are affective reactions to the coaching experience (i.e. how the coachee feels during the coaching period), learning (i.e. improved skills), changes in behaviour after being coached, and organizational results (i.e. the effects of training on productivity and quality). Moreover, a further key outcome is the achievement of organizational objectives for evaluating the benefits of coaching (Feldman & Lankau 2005, p. 834).

The reason the coaching process is depicted in Figure 1 as two arrows combining to form a circle is that during coaching the coachee may often have to return to the so-called beginning, i.e. reflecting on the goals and tasks set at the beginning of the process and repeatedly answering questions related to the leader's identity (referred to as the self by Baumeister [1986]). Moreover, while coaching as a process has a beginning and end, learning never ceases (Feldman & Lankau 2005). One's role as a coach may end when

the mutually agreed contact expires, but the development process of the coachee will continue.

3. The Coach

In the centre left of Figure 1 is the coach, which is placed on the left because the coach will start the process. Moreover, the coach influences how the coaching process progresses and what kind of coaching techniques will be used. Coach's role in this study leans on the coaching theories of Gregory et al. (2011), Nelson and Hogan (2009), and Grant (2009). These scholars are underlining the role of a coach as being a peer supporter, a person who sees her coachee as a whole, not just a defect of behaviour, which should be quick fixed or changed. The intention of a coach is to support the leader in her personal development, to help her to learn to change her behaviour, guide to be more aware of inner-self in order to improve well-being in the work place and in the whole organization.

4. Leader

The leader can be found in the centre-right of Figure 1. The leader is as important a part of the coaching process as the coach. This study leans strongly on Bass's (1999) theory of transformational leadership, which is focusing on leader's aim is to develop followers' capability to uplift their moral as well her own.

This study relies also on Kets De Vries' perception of leadership as an activity that occurs in interaction with followers (Kets De Vries et al. 2010). Consequently, there is no leadership without followers, and a leader's performance is always reciprocal: followers influence the leader, and leader's performance has an impact on followers. Thus, to be a good leader requires good followers (Kets De Vries et al. 2010; Avolio 2011) also underlines the importance of followers, claiming that followers' role has been underestimated in leadership research. Therefore, leadership should not be studied without understanding followers' influence. Such research supports the decision in this study to include interviews with larger groups of participants.

The leader in Figure 1 is both part of the process and the place where that processes begins to occur internally. The process is first a model created by the coach, which then develops as coaching progresses. For example, the process and its various exercises may help the leader learn to approach interpersonal conflicts in a new way (Jehn 1997; Wall & Callister 1995; Deutsch 1990). Thus, when an interpersonal conflict then emerges within the given organizational context, the leader will react differently, the process having altered how she acts. For this reason, the arrows representing the circle are part of coaching and development.

5. Interpersonal conflicts

This study relies on Jehn's (1997), Wall and Callister's (1995), and Deutsch's (1990) theorization on interpersonal conflicts, which is guided by the

assumption that such conflicts inevitably occur on an interpersonal level despite the place, form of team or culture. According to these scholars, an interpersonal conflict emerges when individuals disagree on something, thereby arousing anger and negative emotions.

In addition, this study leans on Kabanoff's (1990) five styles of conflict management – avoiding, accommodating, compromising, competing and collaborating – when assessing leaders' ability to intervene in interpersonal conflict situations. At the same time, Deutsch's (1990) conflict resolution techniques have been key methods for helping leaders learn to better resolve interpersonal conflicts. Deutsch's resolution management programme includes 1. knowing what type of conflict one is involved in, 2. becoming aware of the causes and consequences of violence and its alternatives even when one is very angry, 3. facing conflict rather than avoiding it, 4. respecting oneself and one's interests as well respecting others and their interests, 5. exploring one's own and others interests to identify common and compatible interests, 6. defining conflict interests between oneself and the other as a mutual problem to be solved cooperatively, 7. when communicating with the other, alternating between listening and speaking to enhance understanding, 8. being alert to one's own and others' natural tendencies to bias, misperceptions, misjudgements, and stereotyped thinking that commonly occur during heated conflict, 9. developing skills for dealing with difficult conflicts, and 10. knowing oneself and how to typically respond in different types of conflict situations (Deutsch 1990, p. 254). These 10 guidelines have been the key components for me as a coach when coaching leaders to learn how to resolve interpersonal conflicts and intervene in interpersonal conflict situations.

At the bottom of Figure 1, a further arrow represents interpersonal conflicts (Jehn 1997). However, conflicts could be replaced by any other problem or topic that the researcher prefers to investigate. The definition of interpersonal conflict used in this study is based on the conflict researcher Jehn (1997), and her views on the types of conflicts that exist.

In turn, the approach chosen for understanding the causes of interpersonal conflict and the factors affecting those causes relies on Wall and Callister's (1995) approach. This includes: 1. Interpersonal characteristics, 2. Perceptual interface, 3. Communications, 4. Behaviour, 5. Structure, and 6. Previous interactions and issues.

In addition, this study utilizes Wall and Callister's (1995) process approach to managing conflicts in combination with Deutsch's approach. These two approaches are complementary rather than contradictory, as Deutsch's approach is more fine-grained, explaining techniques in more detail and not as a process:

1. Do not allow a conflict to build, 2. A conflict avoided from the beginning is better than a conflict managed, 3. By the time it is identified, a conflict has probably proceeded sufficiently far that rectifying the original cause may be insufficient, 4. If the issues can be identified, reduce them to a salient, manageable set, 5. Adopt a paradigm approach, 6. Avoid the tendency to

fixate on conflict and its resolution, and 7. Conflict management is a skill that can be taught and developed.

The interpersonal conflict arrow also includes the effects and role of a coach. This includes how the chosen techniques work for a leader's development as a person and her ability to overcome her fears and face discomfort. It also involves how a coach could better support the coachee to intervene in and resolve interpersonal conflicts. At this point, I will strongly emphasize my role as a professional coach. Earlier, when explaining the position of "Coach" in Figure 1, I focused primarily on the kind of person I am, i.e. who I am by nature, and how I understand transformational leadership.

My role as a coach also concerns setting boundaries, which means that I must also be able to see my limits and limitations and be capable of stepping back, when needed, to give space to my coachee. In addition, as Feldman and Lankau (2005) recommend, I must also be able to accept the failures of my coachee. Failures are very common during the enrolment process and also frequently occur throughout the entire coaching period. If a coach reacted negatively to the coachee's failure, becoming personally offended, the coach would be unable to support the coachee fully.

6. Coaching techniques

In Figure 1, next to Bass's Four I's, five techniques are mentioned. These refer to the main techniques I have chosen to use while coaching. These techniques resonate with Kets De Vries and Korotov's (2007) model of three-triangle framework, which these scholars created to better guide leaders through transformational education. The three-triangle framework consists of mental life triangle meaning taking "both cognitive and emotional processes into consideration". The second triangle includes psychic conflicts, explaining, "how they arise from unacceptable feelings or thoughts". The third triangle is about relationships describing "how individual's early life experience create patterns of response that are repeated throughout life" (Kets De Vries & Korotov 2007, p. 377).

The techniques used in this research when coaching are described below:

1. Clarifying identity, i.e. the leader self-reflecting on herself, and her feelings, emotions and actions (Baumeister 1986). In this study, clarifying identity refers to the self-identification process more than to scientifically describing the essence of human identity (Kroger 2017; Baumeister 1986).
2. Giving regular positive feedback: to be able to support leader's emotional and cognitive change, praising is used regularly. Systematic positive feedback will influence leader's self-esteem and identity, and it will have positive impact on performance (Miles & Huberman 1994; Dweck 1986).
3. Verbal transformation (including using "and" instead of "but", using "I need" instead of "you should", saying "I hear you" instead of "you always", and adding something to the previous idea or presentation using "may I build in this").

4. Working out: to Aiming to challenge leader to move physically and thereby influence her physical well-being.
5. Keeping a diary for reflecting on one's own work, personal development, and internalization.

These are concrete techniques for teaching leaders to learn to develop their self-esteem to have courage to resolve interpersonal conflicts. The coaching techniques used in this process are strongly built on an action-research based approach where the researcher herself is part of the process and plays a role to play in examining the outcome. Such an approach is defined by scholars such as Lüscher and Lewis (2008) and Eriksson and Kovalainen (2008).

7. Outcomes

The last object in Figure 1 is the large arrow on the right, which leads the whole process forward and also represents the outcomes of the entire research process (Coleman et al. 2014). This arrow represents the results of more effective interpersonal conflict resolution, the ability to notice interpersonal conflicts and the courage to intervene in them. This arrow thus also relates to one of the research questions: how to help the leader intervene in and more effectively solve interpersonal conflicts and eliminate the fear of intervening.

The Figure 1 depicts the theoretical framework of this research. Both the coach and coachee are presented as equal because both parties are necessary for change to occur. In turn, coaching is in the middle of the process, representing the core of the research. The supporting theories are based on transformational leadership and Bass' Four I's (Bass & Riggio 2006), the Full Range Leadership Model (Northouse 2016; Avolio 2011), interpersonal conflicts (Jehn 1997; Wall & Callister 1995), coaching (Grant 2015; Feldman & Lankau 2005), and conflict resolution (Coleman et al. 2014).

My aim has been to describe how coaching plays a key role in a leader's personal development while the above-mentioned approaches define the attributes on which I wish to focus when examining leadership and my coaching. The circular nature of the central arrows reflect the fact that coaching and research never come to end, even if the official coaching project concludes at a specified time.

3. Research Methodology

In this chapter, the key concepts in the philosophy of social science will be presented. In addition, qualitative research is introduced, as is action research as methodology.

3.1 Research Perspective

“To know what you are doing, you need to know how your model of knowing affects what you are doing.”

- Miles and Huberman (1984, p. 20) -

The key concepts in the philosophy of social science include ontology, epistemology, methodology, methods, and research paradigm (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008; Hudson & Ozanne 1988). Ontology concerns the essence of the relationship between people and society, in practice, the world in its entirety. It concerns the nature of reality (Hudson & Ozanne 1988) and provides answers to the key question “what is there in the world?” (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008, p. 14). Ontology can be separated into objectivist and subjectivist approaches. Subjectivist ontology leans on the assumption that reality is comprehensible as a subjective mental construction; therefore, methods like case studies or narrative and ethnographic research are based on subjectivist ontological assumptions. This subjectivist view, also called constructionism, claims that “reality does not exist outside individuals” (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008, p. 14). Ontology concerns the perspective that people, by their actions, generate on their own social realities. People who act in this world can change their ideas, attitudes and ways of behaving, all of which have an impact on the perceived reality as a cognitive process (Hudson & Ozanne 1988), as will later be demonstrated in my three case studies in different organizations. Objectivism, by contrast, considers the social world to exist independently of people and their actions. As the world exists independently of the way it is perceived, reality is therefore seen as objective.

Epistemology, in turn, concerns the existence and creation of knowledge and answers the question “what is knowledge and what are the sources and limits of the knowledge?” (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008, p. 14). The purpose of epistemology is to discover what creates scientific customs and processes, what can really be known and whether knowledge is even possible in a certain situation (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008). According to Karatas-Özkan and Chell (2010), ontology concerns the nature of being, while epistemology relates to what we can know.

Methodology answers the question “how knowledge can be generated?” Due the fact that methodology is the philosophy of answering this question (Ghauri & Grønhaug 2005), epistemology and methodology are closely related, although methodologies are more practical than epistemologies (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008, p. 15). Methods are concrete techniques, explicit ways of data collection and analysis when conducting research. They constitute “rules and procedures, tools or ways of proceeding to solve the problems” (Ghauri & Grønhaug 2005, p. 40).

This study adopts the philosophical approach of ontological constructionism, where reality is seen as an achievement of social and cognitive processes (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008). The research approach of this study is interpretative and qualitative, investigating a social phenomenon within its context. In this study, the social phenomenon is leader interventions in interpersonal conflict situations. Due to the fact that I intervene in the process by coaching and also by influencing the results, I have chosen action research as my method.

3.1.1 Action research

“Action research is an orientation to knowledge creation that arises in a context of practice and requires researchers to work with practitioners” (Huang, Iun, Liu & Gong 2010).

The term “action research” was originally created by John Collier (Nielsen & Svensson 2006), who used it for the first time in an article published in 1945, although some claim that he used “action” as early as 1917. Eriksson and Kovalainen (2008, p. 195) name several figures who have developed action research: the well-known American sociologist Kurt Lewin (1890–1947), Elton Mayo (1880–1949), and William Foot Whyte (1914–2000). Action research is rooted in social psychology, but is also connected to anthropological and social anthropological community research (Smith & Fernie 2010; Huang et al. 2010; Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008; Reason & Bradbury 2001). Moreover, action research is based on qualitative research, although qualitative research “is research about practice, not with practitioners” (Huang et al. 2010, p. 94). Qualitative research can be approached as a “way of looking at the world and a constellation of

approaches used to generate knowledge about the human world” (Higgs 2009, p. 3).

The purpose of qualitative research is to achieve profound understanding of a precise topic (Lincoln & Guba 1985). Furthermore, Ghauri and Grønhaug (2005) claim that qualitative research is especially important in cases where the subject to be examined is not predictable; i.e. it is impossible to measure precisely how the behaviour under scrutiny occurs or how the key interventions in that same behaviour affect key outcomes. In such a situation, the research methods need to be flexible, closely following the process along which the phenomenon under scrutiny unfolds – a phenomenon which is often unpredictable and affected by human behaviour. Ghauri and Grønhaug (2005) also call for appropriate justification when using qualitative research methods. Moreover, Eriksson and Kovalainen (2008) recommend that researchers clearly specify whether their research is qualitative or quantitative and justify the choice. This study is qualitative, and I have chosen action research as my method to investigate three leaders, their behaviour and learning, the impact of coaching and my influence as a researcher. A qualitative approach was chosen because, according to Myers (2013, p. 5), qualitative methods help researchers understand “the social and cultural contexts within which people live”, thereby producing knowledge of something new, something which has not been seen or described before.

Action research is a research approach in which researchers “actively engage with and work within a business in order to help them solve specific problems, develop some parts of business or organizational activities, give insight [in]to strategic questions and make [the] business work more efficiently” (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008, p. 193). According to Adelman (1993), this approach – helping solve intragroup problems – was also the preferred approach of Kurt Lewin (one of the architects of action research). Action research can therefore be considered an appropriate method when researching a specific group or organization, community or workplace where actions are developed over a longer period of time and where the aim is to produce pragmatic information that is beneficial on a daily basis (Lüscher & Lewis 2008; Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008).

Lüscher and Lewis (2008, p. 224) observe that the purpose of action research is to “improve organizational, theoretical and emancipatory systems”. Furthermore, another significant aspect of action research is that the researcher acts as part of the group (Lüscher & Lewis 2008; Reason & Bradbury 2001). According to Huang et al. (2010, p. 93), “only through action is legitimate understanding possible; theory without practice is not theory but speculation”. Thus, the research method used in this study aims to co-create knowledge together with the research subjects, rather than simply produce knowledge about the subjects. My aim is also to support leaders in their transformation.

Despite the fact that action research has primarily been used in the field of education, it has also been utilized in marketing, management and other

fields of social science where “dialogue and reflection are based on data from experience through active involvement in the process being studied” (Gummesson 2005, p. 323; Berg 2004).

Action research is as an interactive method of information collection; it is a “work in progress”, as Brydon-Miller et al. (2003) write. The process includes such phases as defining the problem, devising a plan, acting to implement the plan, observing, collecting and analysing data, reflecting and sharing (Merriam & Tisdell 2015; Lewin 1946). Action research is a type of research where problem solving and aiming to act as a catalyst for organizational transformation are essential parts of the whole research process. Action research is not completed after some specific data have been collected from particular research objects. On the contrary, it is conducted during the observation and intervention process while trying – as a researcher – to have a positive impact on the whole process and the desired organizational outcomes, which in this study concern the resolution of interpersonal conflicts (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008). The main objective in action research is, according to Reason and Bradbury (2001), to discover how to better understand and eventually improve the present situation. This has been the essence of my coaching and research.

3.1.2 My role as a researcher

As previously mentioned, in action research no strong distinction is drawn between the object to be observed and the observer herself (Huang et al. 2010; Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008). This means the researcher is not only indistinct from the research subjects but is also an active element in the organizational context, influencing the outcomes and goals. Swantz (2008)⁴, an action researcher who participated in a long-term action research study in Tansania, wrote that she had become one of the subjects, as a tribe member put it, she was “one of us”: “To me it does not make sense to come to a group, community or society as an assumed outsider with often shaky or no knowledge of the given situation pretending that with a few questions I can get enlightening answers, which I then go and work into a study. How can I claim to grasp the issues of a group or community whose ownership of knowledge in relation to its own life world I do not give credit”? For Swantz (2008) action research was the most logical way of conducting research on societal and community issues, because it was nonsensical to enter a group as an “outsider”.

My aim as a participant (observer) in this research was to change organizational practices related to interpersonal conflict management as an external member of the organization. Action research is an appropriate approach when the researcher is observing evolving actions in a certain

4 <http://www.aral.com.au/whyar/Swantz.pdf>

organization during a specific period of time and/or when the research attempts to explain a problem which requires significant personal and/or organizational change (Smith & Fernie 2010; Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008).

The role of the researcher is thus significant – as mentioned earlier – and she should be seen as a team member in the research organization.

Nevertheless, this approach also contains some disadvantages. For instance, it is challenging to summarize positive outcomes when the observer is strongly part of the positive development (Reason & Bradbury 2001). In action research, researchers cannot claim to be unbiased; on the contrary, their biases are a part of the interpretive richness of the entire research process (Smith & Fernie 2010).

I identify myself with Denzin and Lincoln's (2000, p. 4) characterization of a "bricoleur", a "storyteller" whose stories are "couched and framed within specific storytelling traditions". In other words, as I see it, the role of an action researcher is to help and support others to see more clearly the organizational context and their own reactions to certain events that unfold (e.g. the escalation of an interpersonal conflict).

The researcher-coach tells a compelling story from an alternative angle, illuminating a key challenge or a problem to support perception of the obstacle to be removed. Denzin and Lincoln (2000, p. 4) also describe a (cultural) researcher as a person involved in a case surrounded by other people, immersed in an interactive process, and strongly influenced by "the researcher's own history and background, social class, race and ethnicity". Their arguments are based on the premise that a researcher can never be completely objective; all researchers bring their own assumptions and individual ways of performing the investigation. This subjectivity could be mitigated by the use of a peer researcher who follows and observes the performance and observations of the primary researcher. However, this would be extremely challenging because the work of coach is sensitive and gaining the respect of the coachee requires discreet behaviour.

According to Huang et al. (2010), action research is closely related to consulting, in this case coaching, but there is a significant difference: action research "stretches beyond a consulting relationship"; in other words, when observing as an action researcher, the relationship between the researcher and the research subjects will deepen, thereby allowing the researcher to create more profound insight and trust than in a normal consultancy relationship (Huang et al. 2010).

During my 20-year career in the media industry, I have acted both as a leader and a follower.

I also have 20 years of experience in Gestalt therapy through my own therapy and from attending various seminars during the past 15 years. Nevertheless, although I use the same techniques as Gestalt-based psychotherapists (Rosner, Canes & Trier-Rosner 1987; Barlow 1981; Perls, Hefferline & Goodman 1951), I am not a Gestalt therapist.

My experience of leadership is derived from a wide range of roles after completing a degree in journalism in 1989, and a Master's degree in pedagogy

at the University of Helsinki in 1999. I gained my first leadership role at the age of 26 at the Finnish commercial television channel MTV 3, after having worked as a journalist for six years. My next job as a leader came two years later and was also in television, setting up a new television channel: Channel Four. My third central leadership position was at an American media company, followed by work in a large Finnish advertising agency as a leader for digital solutions and services. In 2003, I became CEO and partner in a marketing and design company. I sold this company together with my business partners in 2009 to the third biggest media company in Finland, and continued working as a director.

I exit the company 2011, and since that time, I have coached management teams, executives and board members for seven years, which has been the richest time of my life. I can support leaders in the very same problems that I have experienced myself. I can relate to their frustration at being unable to understand interpersonal conflicts and guide them towards personal development and improving their leadership roles. In sum, I can offer help and support because I have needed to resolve these situations myself.

During my leadership career, I met so-called “good” and “bad” leaders. However, what these leaders shared was a lack of knowledge of and an inability to confront and resolve interpersonal conflict situations – which occur on an almost daily basis. From my own experiences, I understand how inconvenient and also how difficult it is to resolve conflicts without the appropriate knowledge or education, and how the results can sometimes be disastrous.

As mentioned earlier, I have attended numerous courses and seminars and gone through psychotherapy and Gestalt therapy during my adulthood, which has allowed me to learn effective techniques and tools for use in my coaching. Techniques such as learning how to be quiet and just listen when receiving negative feedback as a leader and not defending oneself but just saying thank you for the feedback are crucial in resolving interpersonal conflicts. This demands practice, however, and I have learned techniques for listening to the other party, for knowing what to say in conflict situations in order to resolve them, such as phrases like “I hear you” and “what is your need?”, or offering feedback where “and” is used instead of “but”. These are some of the techniques of Gestalt Therapy (Perls et al. 1951). In addition, I have also learned to understand that a person who is angry and involved in an interpersonal conflict can also feel sorrow and sadness underneath. For a leader to be able to react in an appropriate way and resolve the situation, understanding this is crucial.

Some of the key reasons for my interest in interpersonal conflicts and coaching, which have also partly defined my personality, have been experiencing the same challenges in my own work in several organizations and observing that the most challenging and demanding issues are invariably interpersonal conflicts. I have always been a positive, mostly extrovert, open and dynamic person who wants to achieve ambitious goals in a short timeframe. I should have the forbearance to wait for the end result, but I am impatient for the emergence of changes, and these qualities are also reflected

in my coaching. I have always aimed to intervene in problematic situations, wanting to resolve the challenges immediately upon recognizing them – including interpersonal conflicts – in order to move forward. Nevertheless, at the beginning of my leadership career, I did not know how to do this.

When beginning my own career as a leader, the most challenging problems to arise were interpersonal conflicts with and among followers. After facing particularly difficult conflicts, I often needed to visit the lavatory to wash my face and cool down. Consequently, I started to search for support and help in understanding how to resolve these interpersonal conflict situations. I found resolving interpersonal conflicts between my followers' time consuming when there were "much more important things to be taken care off", such as sales, budgeting and meeting clients. Interpersonal conflicts irritated me enormously. This led me to Gestalt-Therapy-based coaching when I found a professional coach using coaching techniques based on this approach when coaching leaders. This was the key factor in my personal transformation, and after years of coaching and practice I became more forgiving; I was no longer so unconditional in my attitude to everything as a leader. Moreover, I became more transformational in the sense of wanting to understand my followers' individual characteristics and traits in order to support them better, although it took years for me to question why every leader did not search for support and use coaching and Gestalt methods to perform better and understand their followers' reactions and emotions. The more I understood my own inner "real" me (Gardner et al. 2005) and my identity (Kroger 2017; Schlenker 1985), the more I was able to support and coach my followers. At the same time, the financial situation in our company began to improve, which indicated the relationship between my personal development as a leader and my leadership style, which had more and more transformational leadership tendencies. However, I still felt I was not quite there.

One may ask why coaching interests me when I could also support myself by doing something else and thereby avoid involvement in interpersonal problems where I risk becoming the target of hate and rejection. My deepest aim in my coaching is to "meet at the boundary of contact" (Rosner et al. 1987, p. 110), where my coachee and I feel we are fully accepted the way we are. My goal is to awaken my clients, to get them to connect with their inner-self (Schlenker 1985) and honestly face that self, in order for them to improve meetings with their followers, perform in a superior way, enjoy their existence and become a better version of themselves. This increases their ability to listen to and hear what their followers are really saying, thereby enhancing their ability to be "better" leaders.

3.1.3 Gestalt-style coaching techniques

The coaching techniques used during this research process and coaching are based on some of the main principals of gestalt therapy methods (Mackewn 1997; Barlow 1981). The German psychiatrist and

psychotherapist Frederick (Fritz) S. Perls is often said to be the person who introduced Gestalt Therapy to the field of psychotherapy in order to challenge the predominance of Freudian techniques (Barlow 1981). His wife, Laura Perls, was also a Gestalt psychologist and a psychotherapist; thus, her influence on Gestalt therapy should not be ignored (Barlow 1981). Moreover, it is important to note that Gestalt therapy differs from Gestalt psychology, and Gestalt theoretical psychotherapy, although some scholars claim that Perls adopted some concepts from these approaches (Perls et al. 1951; Barlow 1981). The differences between Gestalt therapy and Gestalt psychology lie in the characteristics of perceptions of closure; the Gestalt therapy approach is based on the assumption that closure should occur directly after a particular intervention during the therapy session, not later on. This essentially means that when the client becomes aware of their own trauma, the therapist must provide the client with closure, thereby ending the introspective journey, rather than allowing the client to walk away from the session full of uncertainty about what will come next.

Nevertheless, the methods used in Gestalt therapy rely on the present instead of the past. It concentrates on the present moment and feelings by rejecting intellectualization and requiring presence and emotional awareness and the acceptance of responsibility for ourselves (Mackewn 1997; Barlow 1981). The essential goal of Gestalt Therapy is to increase awareness of the present moment and the patient's own behaviour in that very moment, especially her physical feelings and emotions (Mackewn 1997; Barlow 1981). Gestalt therapy methods are the primary focus of this study because in coaching it is central to concentrate on the present, on how to solve the ongoing situation and find solutions by taking responsibility for the present moment (Mackewn 1997; Bluckert 2005). According to Bluckert (2005), coaching and therapy have many similarities, but one of the main differences, however, is the focus on the past when attending therapy and the focus on the present when being coached. Moreover, the circumstances are also different, as is the length and, most importantly, the primary goals: in coaching the primary focus is developing effectiveness (Bluckert 2005).

When coachees become aware of an occurrence in the past that still influences them, the coach must be able to intervene and provide closure by asking about their feelings here and now and ensuring that they are capable of leaving that mental space. Despite its focus on the present, the Gestalt Therapy approach does not reject history. On the contrary, it sees the past as part of a human being, but it focuses on how to live with the past right now, in this very moment. This approach makes Gestalt Therapy different from other therapies; thus, it also distinguishes the coaching techniques used in this study. The focus is the here and now, "what I can do to handle this situation because my past has an impact", instead of dwelling on the past and avoiding finding ways of living the present moment (Perls et al. 1951).

Perls (1951) central aim in Gestalt therapy was to use specific techniques to enhance changes in a person's awareness. Such techniques include making

clients aware of their perceptions and feelings in the present (Barlow 1981). Other techniques, developed further, in particular, by Rosner et al. (1987), focused on enhancing the contact between the self and the environment. One such well-known method is the “hot seat”, in which the person in question is placed on a chair in front of a group. This method aims to help that person increase her self-awareness by concentrating on emotions, rather than thoughts and intellectualization, and through receiving feedback from other participants. This technique has been successfully applied to executives because when a leader concentrates on emotions instead of thoughts (which can be intellectualized), the leader can identify with others’ emotions and expectations by practising sitting in ‘different’ chairs and thus entering into interaction with those individuals, who are not actually present but whom the leader should face. Gestalt therapy thus supports transformational leadership and coaching by focusing on the present and a leader’s own resources and requiring the leader to bear responsibility and not blame others. Consequently, according to Rosner et al. (1987, p. 110), “Gestalt Therapy is not a theory, it is a dynamic interaction – a therapy, a meeting at the boundary of contact”.

Dr. Nigel MacLennan, who has authored over 58 publications on leadership and coaching states that “...coaching is the process whereby one individual helps another: to unlock their natural ability; to perform, learn and achieve; to increase their sense of self-responsibility and ownership of their performance; to self-coach; to identify and remove internal barriers to achievement” (MacLennan 1995, p. 4). In other words, coaching is helping, supporting, listening, encouraging, praising and helping executives reflect and transform into better versions of themselves.

The coaching process can be approached in several ways, depending on the coach’s own background and education and, not least, intellectual traditions (Feldman & Lankau 2005, p. 838). Peltier (2001) nevertheless identifies five dominant approaches to executive coaching interventions:

1. **The Psychodynamic Approach:** The coach uses psychoanalysis to help executives inspect and analyse their unconscious thoughts. This will increase coachees’ understanding of their feelings and emotions and how they act at work. In addition, defence mechanisms are discussed in this approach, as becoming aware of their own defences helps coachees better understand their behaviour and facilitates intervention in dysfunctional behaviour or relationships.
2. **The Behaviourist Approach:** The coach helps executives understand the principles of human behaviour. This includes reinforcement and sanctions and how to use them to motivate followers and enhance communication. The coach should also provide the executive with methods for understanding the ways her own behaviour influences others and how to change that behaviour where necessary.

3. **The Person-centred Approach:** The coach helps the executive see the importance of taking personal responsibility. This means creating a trust-based relationship: one of the pivotal fears of executives is to perceive how others see them. Thus, the coach also helps the executive take responsibility for how others see her. This approach does involve providing a diagnosis or advice; rather, it concerns supporting the executive to recognize what should be changed and creating trust so that the executive can begin the process of changing her behaviour.
4. **The Cognitive Therapy Approach:** The coach's work is "based on the premises from cognitive psychology that people can learn to notice their way of thinking and change their own thoughts" (Peltier 2001, p. 840). The coach helps the executive recognize what the feeling is that triggers a negative reaction and how to prevent such emotions from taking over.
5. **The System-Oriented Approach:** The coach understands that the behaviour of an executive can only be understood in the context of organizational dynamics (Peltier 2001, p. 840). This means that the coach tries to become familiar with the whole organization to gain a holistic understanding of how it works. This will strengthen the coach's ability to help the executive coachee find more powerful ways of influencing not only herself but the entire management team.

The coaching approaches used in this study primarily rely on two of the five approaches in Peltier's (2001) and Feldman and Lankau's (2005) studies. These approaches are the Behaviourist approach, where the coach helps leaders understand their own behaviour and that of others, and the Person-centred approach, where the coach helps a leader take personal responsibility despite, for example, the uncomfortable feelings associated with interpersonal conflicts. Moreover, the Systems-Oriented approach, where the coach must become part of the organization in order to understand the holistic picture, and the Cognitive Therapy approach are also partially used. Furthermore, the methods used in this study lean on a holistic approach to psychotherapy (Rosner et al. 1987; Barlow 1981), where a person is seen as a whole, rather than simply having one problem to be solved. For example, if a coachee experiences a problem facing someone and organizing a one-to-one meeting, it is not simply a question of this meeting but of the leader's own resources when facing the situation. What really makes a leader become so frustrated in such a situation is not meeting that person but something else. This feature of psychotherapy reflects an understanding of individuals as people who are both innovative and capable of creating answers for themselves. On the other hand, individuals are never seen in isolation from their situation and context. This holistic approach is one of the central paradigms of Gestalt Therapy, which has its roots in Freudian psychoanalytic thinking (Perls et al. 1951; Rosner et

al. 1987). Thus, the coach's role and responsibility is to help and support executives to identify and interpret their patterns of behaviour (Feldman & Lankau 2005).

Leaders have been proven to perform better and secure better results if they are self-aware and able to recognize their strengths and weaknesses (Gardner et al. 2005; Bowles & Picano 2007). In addition to supporting and challenging their charges, coaches can help leaders reflect on their own behaviour and observe the world around them in a more considerate and knowledgeable manner. For this reason, this research is based on a behaviourist approach. A person-centred approach was also a central component of the coaching methods included herein, as leaders that hope to have an influence on their followers must be able to assume responsibility for their own feelings and actions.

This is made most apparent in the behaviour displayed by leaders during challenging situations, such as conflicts. One of the focal points of my coaching concerns whether a leader joins the fray and grows angry or can manage to stay outside the situation and observe it carefully without becoming agitated. Can leaders listen to their own inner voice and the opinions of others without judgement or blame? It is also important that leaders are able to build relationships of trust with their closest followers in such a way that these leaders have the opportunity and the confidence to ask for feedback and views on their own behaviour.

3.2 Research Process

This chapter explains the criteria for choosing the particular leaders in this study, introduces those leaders and describes their main goals. In addition, the chapter presents the research process and the different phases in which this research was conducted.

3.2.1 Describing the coachees and goals

When beginning this research in April 2015, my initial idea was to investigate leaders' behaviour in such challenging situations as interpersonal conflict situations, and, more specifically, to examine why leaders do not react, intervene or resolve these situations. This vague idea became clearer after meeting in a seminar the "first leader" – who happened to be my former co-worker – to participate in this research. Before meeting Adam, my first "case" leader, I was coaching a large company with numerous interpersonal conflicts and a leader who did nothing to prevent them, intervene in them or resolve them. After discussing this with my academic supervisor, professor Tikkanen, he suggested that I find three or four leaders from different companies who were struggling with interpersonal conflicts. This was challenging because leaders seldom recognize interpersonal

conflicts as the main problem when transforming their companies – for example, through digitalization – and searching for a coach to support this transformation. Because of the sensitive nature of my topic – conflicts – I was unable to announce publicly that I was searching for leaders who were struggling with interpersonal conflicts. However, my work as a coach mainly concerns coaching interpersonal conflict situations; therefore, I am usually contacted by individuals who are aware of my reputation for coaching the subject. This was also the case during this study. I did not find all three leaders at once but over a period of two years, when the need for interpersonal conflict resolution occurred in their organizations.

My aim was to investigate whether conflict management difficulties exist despite the leadership style, age and gender of a leader, or the industry, size of a company or phase of its growth. In addition, I was interested in investigating whether my role as a coach could have a significant, detectable impact on leadership, i.e. on the company leader's development and ability to intervene in interpersonal conflict situations and resolve them. Therefore, I was faced with the challenging task of finding three leaders who were willing to be coached and observed, who had a need for transformation and who would admit to experiencing interpersonal conflicts in their organization. In order to select such leaders, I decided that the candidates should:

1. Be experiencing difficulties with interpersonal conflicts, the inability to resolve them and the consequent need for change and development.
2. Display divergence in resolving interpersonal conflict management, i.e. different approaches and resolutions for managing interpersonal conflict situations.
3. Have a diverse background and education. I wanted leaders with different experiences from a variety of industries.
4. Display multiplicity in personality and leadership styles: I wanted leaders with different emphases on leadership approaches and methods.
5. Be from distinct industries: not all from the media industry, which would have been most convenient for me because of my background.
6. Hold positions in companies at different stages of growth: I was seeking companies of various sizes to allow me to see whether interpersonal conflicts differed according to the company's size and stage of development.
7. Be from Finnish-based companies, including at least one international company. As I had no possibility of following a leader in a foreign country, I wanted companies based in Finland, although not only around the capital-city area. However, I also wished to find an international company so I could compare whether this affected the management of interpersonal conflicts.

Over the course of two years, as mentioned earlier, I found leaders who I thought would fulfil my requirements. The companies these leaders represent are referred to as A and B and C in this study in order to avoid compromising the anonymity of the leaders and other participants of this research. Moreover, in order to maintain their anonymity, I refer to the leaders by pseudonyms: Adam from Company A, Ben from Company B, and Cecil from Company C. The backgrounds of the situations will be described more specifically in Chapter 4, especially the starting points for coaching and goals.

Adam, Director of Marketing Services and Business

The first research “subject” I met was Adam. When we met, at a seminar in March 2015, I was already coaching other leaders, but they were either unwilling to be observed for this study or failed to fulfil my requirements. After this initial meeting, Adam contacted me – we had worked together for four months in the same company 20 years before – to hear my opinion about “tackling some challenges” that he was experiencing. We met again in April, and after the meeting it was clear to me that “the challenges” concerned interpersonal conflicts and Adam’s inability to resolve them. For example, Adam told me that certain individuals failed to follow orders no matter what he said. He assumed that it was because of the redundancies implemented earlier that same year, but that was clearly not the case. Consequently, I sent him a proposal on how we could proceed with coaching. We began by clarifying the identity of the company, which operated in the media industry.

In addition to this, Adam was confronted with the even bigger problem of sluggish performance in his sales unit. It was essential for his team to get back on its feet and adopt a more energetic attitude in order for the employees to feel less fearful and more positive about their work. As a result, Adam asked me to prepare a seminar for training a group of 50 top professionals, including key leaders, with the aim of preparing them for future digital services, generating a more positive attitude, and improving the team’s internal communications.

Adam remained as positive as 20 years back, laughed a lot and gave the impression of being easy to approach. He had a self-deprecating sense of humour, he loved playing music with his band, and described himself as a wanna-be hard rock musician who wore a suit and a tie. From the very beginning it was easy to talk with Adam.

I began coaching Adam on 13 May 2015. At this time, I asked him if I could use the case as an example in my study, as it was clear to me that the disagreements Adam had seen as marginal were the root of much of the team frustration he had spoken of. For this reason, I felt the case would suit my research profile perfectly. I received his permission to use the case for the present study, and Company A’s CEO approved this. Adam worked for a large international media company, which employed over 250 people in Finland.

Adam was educated as an MBA and had a background in the media industry. He was 38 years old, married and had three under-school-age daughters.

His primary reason for searching for a coach was his need for personal development and support in transforming the company and the whole sales team in order to better answer the challenges of digitalization.

After concluding an eight-month coaching period with Adam, I met Ben in February 2016. Ben had contacted me by phone earlier that month after hearing about my profession from the chairman of the board. After our first meeting, we decided to meet soon again. Ben was easy to approach, analytical and gave the impression of being tranquil and harmonious. It was pleasant to talk with him.

Ben, CEO

Ben was exhausted, he wanted himself a sparring partner in order to gain more energy in challenging transformation of the company. Ben was also frustrated about the long-term interpersonal conflicts that existed in his organization (although he called them “communication problems”). After meeting twice, I submitted my proposal on how to proceed, including the goals of the projects and the related price. I also asked if he was interested in participating in my research process. He found this valuable and was eager to support my research. It was not until later, after realizing what a crucial part they played in his transformation, that I asked the management team members to be part of my research. They all agreed and hoped that this study could also assist other leaders in developing their leadership performance.

Ben was the CEO of a medium-size company in the energy industry with a staff of 40–50 individuals, depending on demand. His background was in the metal industry and he was educated as a Civil Engineer. Ben was 54 years old and married with two adult children.

Ben’s primary reason for searching for a coach was to get sparring partner, and enhance the communication skills of his management team members. The organization also clearly lacked knowledge of how to approach and intervene in interpersonal conflict situations; thus, Ben though enhancing communication skills would also help in the matter.

Cecil, CEO

I received a call in August 2016 from the chairman of the board of Company C asking for my assistance in working through an interpersonal conflict situation. The CEO (Cecil) of Company C had entered into a disagreement with the majority shareholder, who worked at the same company. The chairman was of the opinion that the dispute had become very serious and that a third party was required to resolve it, especially because the disagreement had started to significantly impair the management team’s work. After the phone call from the chairman of the board, I received another call from the CEO. He could not understand majority shareholder’s

reactions at all: Cecil felt he had accomplished all the goals assigned to him and that the company was about to progress to the next level. What was the problem?

After the first phone discussion with Cecil, I called the chairman of the board back and asked if I could include this case in my study. At the time, I felt that this clear case of an in-house dispute would be useful for my research, and it was obvious that it would represent a completely different kind of interpersonal conflict than the conflicts concerning Adam and Ben. The chairman of the board was very amenable but obviously wanted me to ask permission from everybody individually as well. The case turned out to be extremely hectic, and I did not get a chance to ask for this permission until later on.

When meeting Cecil, he was very polite but staid. He was taciturn and gave the impression of having little to say, although, in fact, he had many opinions. It was somehow difficult to approach and talk with him: Cecil certainly listened, but his responses were rather minimal. The company in which Cecil worked was a start-up in the new technology industry. It employed 15–20 people, depending on the need. Cecil had been educated as a Civil Engineer and his background was in sales. He was 46 years old and married with two teenage children.

The three leaders in this research process were all very different by nature and had extremely diverse backgrounds. Moreover, the companies where these leaders worked operated in different industries and were located in geographically separate places in Finland.

Nevertheless, despite differences in nature and background, all the leaders shared one common goal: to learn to intervene in and resolve interpersonal conflict situations and become better, more effective leaders: leaders who could inspire their followers to transform and become more open-minded (Adam) or who could enhance the management team's communication during the organization's transformation and learn how to resolve interpersonal conflict situations (Ben and Cecil).

My goals

My personal goal as the coach was to arrange one-on-one interviews with each member of the team in company A and each member of the management team in companies B and C, and also to intervene in the practicalities, such as attempting to enhance communication by persuading Adam to begin holding regular weekly meetings, encouraging Ben to write regular in-house news letters to enhance communication by delivering information, and encouraging Cecil to begin holding regular morning/lunch meetings with his followers without an agenda. Each of these goals was easy to measure through interviews. In addition, another of my personal goals was to help these leaders better understand their interaction with their followers, clearly see the problems and challenges they were facing and guide them in personal development, such as gaining the courage to intervene in

interpersonal conflict situations. A further goal was simply to teach them to use certain techniques when talking and behaving as leaders and coach them in their learning process.

3.2.2 Coaching process and empirical materials

In order to gain a better and wider understanding of the organization in which my coachee worked and to adapt to the organizational cultures as one of the team members, it was necessary for me to interview all of the leaders' team members. Consequently, we formulated a preliminary interviewing timetable, which was given to all the interviewees for acceptance. After this, we drew up a contract. With Ben, we agreed that my compensation would be divided into two parts, a basic fee and a second part to be paid if our jointly set goals were achieved (which they ended up to be achieved partly. I did not receive the goals supporting him in his time management). However, it should be noted that coaching these three leaders was not my only source of income, as I also had other coaching projects. This allowed me to act and react as I saw necessary without feeling that my "hands were tied". This ensured that I was not financially dependent on the coachees related to this research. Moreover, professional coaches must be able to leave their clients if there is clearly no use in spending more time with them (Goldsmith 2004). This is also what occurred in one these cases, as will be explained in more detail in Chapter 4.

After jointly agreeing on the interview schedules, each leader and I planned preliminary meetings for me to participate in and observe. At the same time, a concrete project plan, including the major goals of the project and the interviewees involved in it, was completed and communicated to the participants and also to the whole company in "cases" B and C. The information also included the scheduled interview times and the reasons for the interview. Adam delivered this information to his management team members and sales team, but saw no reason to deliver the message to the entire company, which included 250 employees in Finland and other countries.

The obstacles, challenges and motivations behind each leader's transformation project were discussed deeply. I needed to know why they were ready to ask for help from an outsider in their transformation at this very moment, and not earlier or later, and what the true reason was behind their need for professional support. Here, my approach is in line with Goldsmith's (2004), who does not begin coaching if the person is not sufficiently involved and willing to be coached. I wanted these leaders to be ready to make a "sincere effort and sincere commitment to personal development", as Goldsmith writes (Goldsmith 2004, p. 2). Adam and Ben also asked me to hold one-to-one and team coaching sessions with their team members. The goals of these sessions were also discussed.

Gathering information

The main information gathering techniques were interviews and observations: I not only interviewed each leader's team members, but also the staff of company B in every department, including the office, the design and production departments and the factory. This was because Ben wanted to gain a wider and more profound picture of his organization's communication difficulties and interpersonal conflicts and to discover the true extent of the impact of these conflicts.

In turn, Cecil wished me to interview everybody in his company to gain a "truer picture" of interpersonal conflicts, as he put it himself. It was difficult for him to believe that there were any problems with his way of leading. In addition, I had time to conduct one extra interview with the management team before the coaching project ended.

All but two of the interviews were conducted in an office room; the two exceptions were conducted as phone interviews, as the participants were abroad. The languages for the interviews were primarily Finnish and English, although with one person Swedish was also used, and with another French was used. Everything in the interviews was confidential. I also informed the participants that they were entitled to see the summary that I would write of interview, including the necessary changes.

Do to the confidential nature of the interviews, only three interviewees agreed to be recorded in the first round of interviews. Indeed, some interviewees stated that if the interview was recorded they would refuse to participate. However, when conducting the second round of interviews after the projects, six interviewees agreed to be recorded. The interviews were conducted in nondirective style, meaning starting by general questions about interviewee's role, work, leisure time etc. to gain trust. I then moved to semi-focused interview technique, including specific topics such as well-being, challenges, frustration, cause of it if any, leadership, decision making, and finally interpersonal conflicts. I also included in every interview a question of their need.

During the interviews, notes were taken in real time and after the interviews a summary of these notes was shown to the interviewee, who had the opportunity to correct the assumptions in that summary. Every interviewee was given the opportunity to ask for the written document after the interview, but they did so on just two occasions. The study included a total of 47 interviewees, and the time reserved for each interview was 45 minutes per person. Occasionally, however, the interview time was extended by up to 30 minutes when the interviewee required more time to explain her opinions, which occurred in company B. The interviewees included both women and men, who varied between 22 and 70 years of age. A second round of interviews was also conducted where I interviewed a portion of the same people. These interviews were also semi-structured. In total, I conducted 62 interviews.

At the end of each interview, I compiled a personal to-do list for each individual. It listed the things they should observe, task to be done, and the actions they should perform. In addition, I wrote down each person's wish list of things that could be done to make their own work more efficient and all the obstacles that were preventing this. These lists were presented to the leader at the end of every interview day along with a written version that was sent to his email. This list was supposed to be followed by the CEO or director, and the CFO if needed. I also included short summaries of the interviews in order to gather similar challenges and obstacles together. At the end of each interview, I created a matrix to illustrate the primary types of challenges that each company faced, and I gathered similar problems, conflicts and concerns in their own columns to be able to see, what were the main obstacles preventing the development.

After interviewing the members of Cecil's management team, however, I did not send him a list summarizing the interviews, as we were scheduled to meet in person and discuss the list. However, this meeting never occurred, as Cecil was dismissed before we had time to accomplish our project.

Additional gathering techniques

I also applied a variety of informal methods for obtaining the required background information and knowledge: In order to make my coaches feel more relaxed, I refrained from sending out questionnaires or forms – except in the end of the research I send the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (Bass & Avolio 1994) in order to verify leaders' own perception of their leadership style, nor did I want to conduct formal interviews with the leaders at the beginning. The very first times I met Adam and Ben, I asked them to take a walk with me, have lunch or meet me outside the office. I wanted the contact with my 'informants' to be as informal as possible. However, with Cecil there was only time to meet once outside the office. After these walks or lunch meetings, I wrote down my primary conclusions or I recorded oral notes with my mobile phone to allow me to remember the discussions and write them down later.

As mentioned above, all three leaders received Bass's Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (Bass & Avolio 1994; MLQ multifactor leadership questionnaire Mind Garden), to evaluate their leadership styles. This questionnaire contains 45 questions to be answered on a scale ranging from 0 to 4 (0 = not at all / 1 = Once in a while / 2 = Sometimes / 3 = Fairly often / 4 = Frequently or always). Only Adam and Ben responded. Their answers to the questionnaire mostly supported the opinions of their followers' on the two men's leadership styles: For instance, both Adam and Ben agreed with the statement that they talked "enthusiastically about what needs to be accomplished" (Adam 3 and Ben 4), and that they talked "optimistically about the future" (both 4) – which clearly supports a transformational leadership style, and was in line with the opinions of their followers. Adam

and Ben also agreed with the statement that they considered “the moral and ethical consequences of decisions” (Adam 3, Ben 4).

While the survey largely confirmed the opinions expressed by Adam and Ben’s followers, the results also indicated that the leaders had an exaggerated impression of their diligence. For example, both men felt that they went “beyond self-interest for the good of the group” (Adam 4, Ben 3), while their followers clearly required more of them. In addition, Adam and Ben claimed to “delay responding to urgent questions” “once in a while” (Adam) or “sometimes” (Ben), while their followers clearly had the opinion they did not answer quickly enough and blamed both Adam and Ben for being lazy.

Moreover, both Adam and Ben felt that “I lead a group that is effective” only “fairly often” (they both gave 3 instead of 4). Here Adam’s sales team and Ben’s management team slightly over-rated their own capacity compared to how their leaders saw their team members.

Nevertheless, the questionnaire clearly demonstrates that both Adam and Ben partly fulfilled the criteria for performing as a transformational leader, but they also fulfilled the criteria for performing transactional leadership style. It is also worth noting, however, that both Adam and Ben felt they did much more for their followers than their followers’ opinions gave cause to believe.

Process phases

The coaching process always begins by discovering the need for transformation, the key obstacles and the behaviour to change (Grant 2015; Goldsmith 2004). The purpose of the project must be clear and explained to all the participants, especially the leader and the management team members. It is also crucial to formulate a strict schedule, decide as concrete and measurable goals as possible for the coaching project and present the desired improvement targets and key ideas for how to achieve those targets before starting the project (Feldman & Lankau 2005).

After completing the project plan, including the goals, the interviews were held to expand my understanding of the leader’s leadership style and performance and the challenges to be overcome in order to create a better atmosphere and facilitate intervention in interpersonal conflicts.

The coaching-process research of this study, progressed through three stages, adapted from Miles and Huberman (1994). These stages were the following: Stage 1: Open code/descriptive codes. For example, finding answers to the question of whether the style of leadership has changed, and sorting those answers. Stage 2: Features/attributes of the theme. For example, identifying how transformational leadership is performed by the actor-informants. Stage 3: Theoretical pattern. Deciding whether any pattern in the processes, interventions or leadership styles supports existing theories?

In addition, my role as a coach was also carefully defined. With Adam, my role was to coach him to enhance his way of motivating followers and support

him in his transformation process. This meant coaching Adam to learn how to resolve interpersonal conflict situations. By contrast, with Ben it was clear that the management team expected me to run the communication project and have a deep impact on the process. Personally, however, Ben needed support to learn how to intervene in and resolve interpersonal conflicts. He simply needed more courage and fortitude. In turn, with Cecil, the management team expected its voice to be heard and the CEO to receive help from me in resolving an already serious interpersonal conflict situation.

With each coachee, the project was divided into four different process phases and conducted accordingly. The phases are described more precisely below:

1. Definition phase:

- 1a.** Contacting the client, receiving requests for support.
- 1b.** Signing a contract, deciding on mutually agreed goals, formulating a project plan – including a preliminary timetable of events, meetings, visits, confidential interview times, and coaching sessions.
- 1c.** Interviewing leaders, members of the management team and followers; communication with the interviewees and arranging the interview time; presenting summaries and conclusions of each interview to the participants; going through the interviews together with the leader.

2. Action phase

- 2a.** Making observations while interviewing the followers participating in the meetings, observing and coaching the leader face-to-face after the observation, writing memorandums of meetings and observations.
- 2b.** Making suggestions to support successful transformation by resolving interpersonal conflict situations; rehearsals of new coaching techniques.
- 2c.** Requirements for implementing the insights gained from previous phases.

3. Follow-up Phase

- 3a.** Following set tasks and goals, adjusting the weak parts.
- 3b.** Measuring outcomes.
- 3c.** Analysing the goals that were established and researched.

4. Reporting phase:

- 4a.** Finalizing the project: Interviewing the participants once again and measuring the outcomes. Here, not all the interviewees from the first phase participated, as some had left the company and some were unavailable due to illness or being on holiday or abroad.

- 4b.** Delivering a final report: presenting the final report to the person who had ordered the coaching project.
- 4c.** Discussion about unrealized goals. Deciding what should still be done and creating timetables for finalizing these tasks.

After the coaching period (Adam 10 months, Ben 24 months and Cecil 3 months), the research process followed Miles and Huberman's (1994) stages as presented above.

Five coaching techniques

In order to most effectively guide the coachees, the techniques used during coaching are in line with the Three-Triangle Framework founded by Kets De Vries and Korotov (2007). These scholars, in order to teach and support leaders through transformation, founded three needs which ought to be taken into consideration when focusing in changes in behaviour. These include both "cognitive and emotional processes", understanding "how psychic conflict arises from unacceptable feelings or thoughts", which may provoke reactions of anxiety and defence, and understanding how "an individual's early life experience creates patterns of response". These responses can be repeated through the leader's entire lifetime, thereby unconsciously influencing the leader's leadership style (Kets De Vries & Korotov 2007, p. 378).

During the coaching, I used five coaching techniques based on Gestalt Therapy (Mackewn 1997) and Wall and Callister's (1995) methods for resolving interpersonal conflicts. These were 1. Clarifying identity, 2. Giving regular feedback, 3. Verbal transformation, 4. Working out, and 5. Keeping a diary. These techniques are presented in more detail below:

1. Clarifying identity

When leaders' understanding of their own self (Kroger 2017; Baumeister 1986) becomes clearer after answering the six questions below, it is easier for them to understand why they may be avoiding conflicts or even failing to see them. Answering these questions helps leaders evaluate their self-image. Some of the questions include tasks to be performed together with followers or family members.

- Vision: What is the most important dream in my life? Where do I want to go?
- Mission: What is my personal purpose for living and existing? What would be missing if I were not here to fulfil my existence?
- Position: What are my positions? I.e. what are all the roles I perform during my life?
- Promise: What do I promise to my nearest and dearest? What promise illustrates my own self and my uniqueness? USP = unique selling point/position describing my uniqueness. Where am I special or unique? How do I differ from others?

- Personality: What different adjectives do I use to describe myself? How would the three people closest to me describe me as a person?
- Value: What are the most important values influencing my life? What are the values acting like my driving force in my everyday life?

Figure 2, in the shape of a flower, is used to clarify such identity questions, with each petal describing the multiple layers of identity. The same flower can be used to clarify a company's identity and help leaders compare their values with those of their company. Figure 2 does not cover all the layers of identity; rather, it guides leaders to think and reflect on their feelings, emotions and actions and serves in more concrete way.

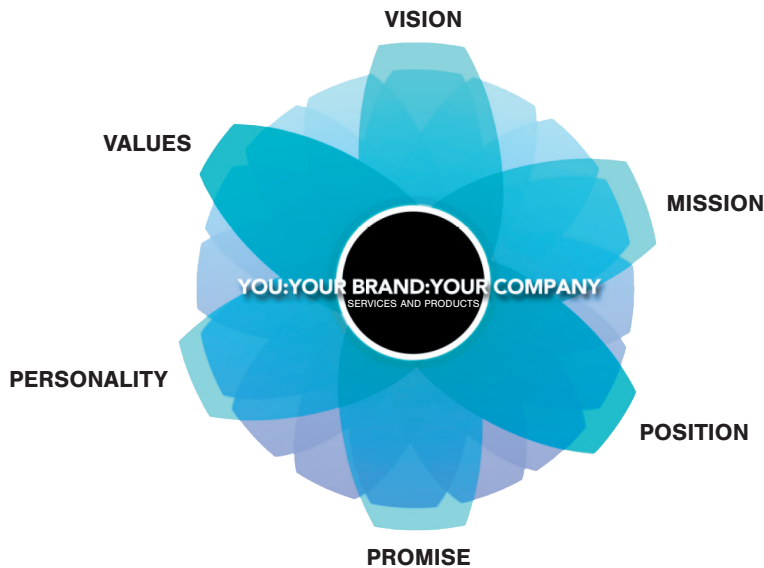


Figure 2. Identity model for clarifying a leader's self

2. Providing regular positive feedback

Leaders who encourage their followers praise them. This is a technique for supporting followers to believe in themselves and helping them become more motivated and enthusiastic. This has a direct positive impact on the quality of work and the development of the company's finances. Praising refers to thanking employees for their work, thanking them for paying attention to something or for a comment that has provoked positive emotions in others, or thanking them for attendance or presence. Thus, acknowledging and praising are not necessarily connected to performance or a task and its accomplishment; rather, they can also relate to a follower's positive attitude or that person's ability to communicate or support a colleague. This has an impact on the working atmosphere and, according

to Bass (1999), also substantially reduces the appearance of interpersonal conflicts. This task is primarily based on the approaches of Skinner (1968), and Dweck and Leggett (1988).

3. Verbal transformation

The key tool for helping leaders learn how to resolve interpersonal conflicts is for them to use “and” instead of “but”, “need” instead of “you should”, “I hear you” instead of “you always”, and “may I build on this” in their communication. By learning how to use these words and phrases, a leader creates a sense that both parties have been consulted and that the other’s message is relevant. When a conflict occurs, the two parties generally accuse each other, and at this point, the decisive factor for avoiding escalating the conflict is to use “and” rather than “but”: “you said it like this AND this is how I hear it...”. If “but” is used instead – “BUT this is how I hear it...” – the other party’s defences will rise and the negotiation will become deadlocked.

The discussion can proceed by trying to reverse the situation so as to concentrate on the need of the negotiator – “I have a need, request, wish...” or “I need you to...” – instead of saying, “you always” or “you never”. Using “you always” or “you never” will only raise the other party’s defences and provoke a negative attitude towards resolving the situation.

In situations where the parties are arguing about who said what and the effects of those utterances, leaders might deny their counterpart’s feelings by saying, “it was not like that”. However, a more effective approach is to use “I hear what you are saying”, thereby confirming that the leader will hear the opposite party and is ready to accept that the counterpart’s truth is equally valuable.

Moreover, when seeking reconciliation, one can always respect the other’s feelings and views, even if they differ from one’s own, by asking, “may I build on this?”, or “may I continue from that?”

4. Working out

In this study, physical training is part of the techniques used, but it is not researched scientifically. In my experience, physical activity, exercising, walking, going to gym and playing sports can be related to conflict resolution. I have noticed that the better physical condition a person has, the better is her psychological condition and the more efficient she is at resolving problems and believing that she is capable of resolving interpersonal conflicts. Leaders who look physically healthy also arouse trust and respect in their followers. Physical training also seems to develop self-esteem, which is crucial for every leader.

5. Keeping a diary

Reflection is also one of the techniques used in my coaching, but again it is not researched scientifically. Instead, the following represents my own observations from previous coaching sessions. Reflection is an effective way to develop one’s own thinking and analytical ability and to perceive

one's development as a participant in a conflict, a third party or a conflict resolver. Likewise, the diary works as extra memory of past interpersonal conflict resolutions by serving as a reminder of how the situation was resolved and what actually caused it. History repeats itself, so is also worth re-reading both one's own diary and the leadership literature at regular intervals. In short, reflecting should be part of a leader's everyday agenda.

Evaluation of the research

Eriksson and Kovalainen (2008) underline the importance of reliability in qualitative research; thus, according to them reliability should be evaluated repeatedly during the process rather than simply at the end of the research project. Corbin and Strauss (2008) summarize qualitative research as "a form of research in which the researcher collects and interprets data, making the researcher as much a part of the research process as the participants and the data they provided" (Corbin & Strauss 2008, p. 4).

Consequently, as a form of qualitative research, action research can be easily accused of covert consultation (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008). This study has sought to safeguard itself against such charges and to ensure its reliability by using Gummesson's (2005) criteria of validity. These criteria are divided into four categories and are presented next in adapted form, as described by Eriksson and Kovalainen (2008, p. 204):

1. Research requires theoretical justification: thus, this study requires theoretical justification, whereas consultancy work requires empirical justification. This is one of the main differences between consultancy and research work.
2. Implementation of rigorous inquiry and documentation: this research requires precise, archived documentation, which is not required from a consultant.
3. Differences in process: action research is cyclical and requires more time than consulting, which occurs over a short period of time, making consultancy projects linear.
4. A Researcher remains attached to the research materials and revisits the case over time, whereas a consultant can move onto the next case. The research process data were collected from several sources, such as interviewees (46 different), emails (1415) and videos (201 minutes). The research process was also documented as it occurred. Moreover, the coaching techniques were accurately described to allow them to be repeated outside this research. Nevertheless, the way these techniques will work also depends on how they are adopted by the coach and coachees.

Reliability also requires that the research can be replicated. As mentioned above, all the techniques used could be repeated; however, the variables – the coach and coaches, organizations and cultures – will influence the outcomes in an unpredictable manner.

Although my role was to become part of the team, which allowed me a much closer and more timely view of events in the company than if I had only been observing, there also were some disadvantages to this approach: when the same person is both coaching and collecting data, it might not be possible to remember or even see everything. For example, I might have missed something when simultaneously taking notes, interviewing and coaching that would have led to deeper discussions if I had only recognized it. Likewise, by engaging in these activities simultaneously, I might also have forgotten to write something down after the coaching sessions. I tried to ensure that I made notes or videotaped my thoughts as soon as possible, but sometimes this did not occur before late in the evening, and thus I might have forgotten something crucial. Moreover, no one else was evaluating the interpersonal conflict situation in order to identify the kind of dynamics present when I was intervening. Often it was impossible for me to both participate in the interpersonal conflict situation and act as an observer. Thus, the descriptions of my experiences are subjective; someone else might have experienced them differently.

Duration

My coaching engagement with Adam lasted from 13 May 2015 to 18 December 2015, a total of eight months. After this official period was over, I visited the team again in January and February 2016 to gauge the team's development. I also participated in the recruitment of a new sales director, after Adam requested my support in that process. After the project was over, I continued to meet with Adam to work out and have power walks, as we called them. During these weekly sessions, we would often talk about the challenges he was facing. We still meet on occasion for shared walks, and our conversations touch on leadership and how to develop and succeed in this area.

I first made a contract with Ben covering the 10 months from February 2016 until December 2016. After that, we extended our coaching project until February 2018, making a total of 24 months. In February 2018, we had our last coaching session by phone. However, we still occasionally talk to each other, often at my own initiative.

The coaching period with Cecil lasted from 15 August 2016 to 19 November 2016, a total of three months and three days. I maintained regular contact with the chairman of the board until Cecil's contract was rewritten, and in the spring of 2017 he continued to work at Company C as the sales director for some months. Since our project ended, I have had no contact with Cecil except for a few messages asking questions related to this study.

Figure 3 shows the length of each coaching process. The circles below the timeline represent the leaders, Adam, Ben and Cecil. It should be noted

that coaching two leaders intensively at the same time is possible but not recommended when simultaneously conducting research. Nevertheless, when coaching normally, i.e. when not also conducting research, two or even three intensive coaching projects can be run simultaneously.

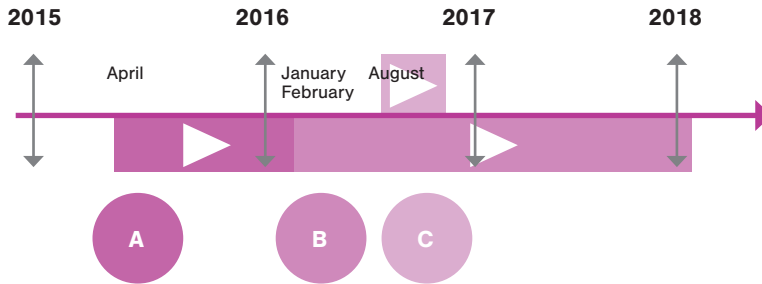


Figure 3. Duration of each coaching process

Gathering empirical materials

During the coaching period of two years and ten months, I gathered diverse materials in order to conduct this research (Table 3). These materials include one-to-one coaching notes, interviews, observation memorandums, emails, videos, Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire, and seminars facilitated by an outsider or myself.

In the three companies, I interviewed a combined total of 47 different interviewees, including all Adam's sales team members (13), Ben's management team members and office staff and middle managers from the factory (a total of 28), and Cecil's management team members, including one person from the factory (6). My observations lasted a total of 1045.7 hours, including coaching hours, work observation hours, meetings, events, workshops and seminars.

Table 3. Materials and hours during research process

| | One-to-one coaching hours (including coaching over the phone) | Inter-viewees | Inter-views | Inter-viewing hours | Observation and participating hours | Facilitating hours (including seminars, events, client meetings) | Number of e-mails | Videos (minutes) |
|-----------------|---|-----------------|---------------|---------------------|-------------------------------------|--|-------------------|------------------|
| Adam: 8 months | 24 | 13 | 16 | 16.5 | 288 | 36 | 201 | 95 |
| Ben: 24 months | 58 | 28 | 38 | 42.5 | 595.5 | 66 | 1 181 | 106 |
| Cecil: 3 months | 4.5 | 6 | 8 | 7 | 2.5 | - | 33 | - |
| All together | 86.5 hours | 47 interviewees | 62 interviews | 66 hours | 886 hours | 102 hours | 1 415 emails | 201 minutes |

As can be seen, most observation hours were naturally spent with Ben, due the long coaching period. The number of emails is also the highest with Ben, indicating Ben's need for reflecting and communicating through writing and also the long period of coaching. Adam preferred operating face-to-face or talking on the phone instead of sending emails. By contrast, Cecil preferred sending emails to talking on the phone.

4. Three Stories of Leaders and Their Coach

This chapter focuses on presenting the empirical material collected when Adam, Ben and Cecil were working, the process conducted with each of them and their transformation. In addition, this section also describes the coach, her behaviour, mistakes and her own transformation.

4.1 Adam The Nice Guy

Adam: Director of marketing services and business

Adam sought to clarify his communication and improve the motivational impact he had on his employees in order to build trust and improve his team's sales performance.

Background

Company A operated in the media sector and was part of an international media group. It was classified as a large corporation according to European Union criteria. It had approximately 250 employees, and for the last two years, it had been an unprofitable subsidiary of the group. Moreover, the sales team had been challenged by a negative atmosphere after recent redundancies, and several interpersonal conflict situations had occurred. The team for which Adam was directly responsible for consisted of 16 people; however, he was also responsible for five more employees in two teams in other units. The company language was Finnish and the sales team was solely comprised of Finnish citizens.

1. Leader's personality and leadership style

Training together became a regular part of my coaching sessions. On one occasion, we were training together at the gym. After we had finished, we sat on a bench outside the building and began chatting:

Adam: Great workout today, right?

Me: Really great. Do you ever exercise so hard that your muscles burn?

Adam: In principle yes, but I do notice at times that I'm letting myself off too easily. I could demand more of myself.

Me: What do you mean?

Adam: Well, I've been told that I let myself off too easily at times, that I could develop myself more.

Me: Why don't you demand more of yourself, especially if you know that this is one of your development challenges?

Adam: I don't know.

Adam described himself as outgoing, extrovert and a hard worker. He was easy to approach and positive by nature. He found himself adopting a primarily transformational leadership style, but he occasionally also performed in ways that could be described as more transactional or laissez-faire. This was not only his own impression of himself; it was also my assessment. Furthermore, his followers also recognized these styles and had the same opinion.

Adam required leadership support in order to implement the new sales processes required by digital transformation in Company A. Adam also needed to find novel sales approaches for new products and change the attitude of the sales team, which had been fairly negative during the months before I began coaching. He did not ask for coaching in resolving interpersonal conflicts, but after describing his attitude and some incidents in his team, it became clear to me that he indeed required support in this area. Some interpersonal conflicts had occurred, and the spirit of the sales team was very negative. Organizational changes had raised the issue of the renewal of job titles, and, for example, the removal of team leaders had caused tension between some team members.

I began by conducting confidential one-on-one interviews with each of Adam's sales team members. Adam's followers described him as an extremely extrovert and verbally gifted leader who was also a digital sector expert. Many of his colleagues considered Adam to be very creative and innovative. This was evident from the numerous invitations he received to attend meetings as an expert or motivational speaker. He was also asked to perform at many different kinds of seminars, panels and customer events because he had interesting approaches, he was a motivational speaker, and he was a great ambassador for the company as a trustworthy expert. One good example of Adam's courage and ability to throw himself headfirst into new situations

was his decision to start a customer event by singing a song. Needless to say, those who were present found this very charming and inspiring.

His followers also found him easy to approach as an executive but considered him too caught up in other things to focus on day-to-day management and support the sales group. For example, the group reported that Adam sometimes failed to make important decisions, which left sales staff without crucial information about the new terms and conditions of tenders. He also avoided intervening in disputes between some sales team members, although he was aware of them.

This tendency towards indecision transpired to be one of Adam's biggest problems in the eyes of his team: some believed it was due to laziness, while others attributed it to his lack of time. One way this trait was manifested was the lack of regular weekly meetings, which were frequently re-scheduled. Adam also lacked the time to answer his emails, react to pressing issues that arose during the day or direct the sales activities. In many cases, these factors combined to create a general inability to make decisions.

In general, feedback about Adam placed him squarely within the definition of a typical charismatic (Conger & Kanungo 1987) and transformational leader (Bass 1990; Bass & Riggio 2006). In meetings, he inspired, pushed and helped create a united vision for his employees and expected them to exceed expectations and achieve top results. However, he also displayed some traits of a typical transactional leader, as he rewarded the best salespersons of the week with a gift card, restaurant dinner or spa trip. He was also not afraid to resort to punishments if he felt they were necessary; for example, he was ready to give written warnings if needed, though such a situation had yet to arise. Moreover, it was evident he was not at his best when dealing with conflicts and had difficulties resolving interpersonal conflicts. In fact, on many occasions, he simply did not notice them, even if he was the cause.

2. Focal problem and coaching goals

As previously mentioned, there were 16 people in the team Adam was directly responsible for, plus five other employees in two teams in other units. I met with the first team on a weekly basis, primarily observing their communication and body language in meetings. I also participated in coaching with members of the other two teams, but only to address cases where difficulties had arisen and a third party was requested to help resolve matters.

Disagreements had also arisen inside the team, but Adam did not consider them major problems, although he did say they would hamper future results unless they were addressed. However, he remarked that mediating these "in-house quarrels" himself would have taken time away from more important matters.

Adam felt that one of the greatest challenges he faced was to motivate his staff to become as excited about the new digital content as they were about the company's traditional print products. His team was accustomed to working with magazines and customer publications and would have a hard

time embracing ad sales for digital products in the same way. The change would also mean that his team would have to become familiar with the new technologies and grow adept at using them in their work. The launch of a new customer management database had already created feelings of frustration and annoyance in his team members.

There was much new information to take on, and the markets for both digital products and print media were in flux – no one knew what the future would hold for either one. In Adam's view, the people working under him already felt as if the nature of their work was constantly changing, which led to much uncertainty and frustration. Moreover, unmade decisions on roles and goals in the team had aroused frustration and even interpersonal conflicts. Employees were exasperated because they were not being treated with sufficient sensitivity and their voices were not heard. Nevertheless, Adam failed to see the situation in that way; instead, he attributed it to a lack of communication.

Adam wanted me to act as his sparring partner, his personal coach – someone who would help him guide his team through the changes and instil a positive and energetic attitude in the process. In addition, Adam asked for assistance in developing his communications skills and facing interpersonal conflicts. Nevertheless, this was last on his list. It was necessary for him to provide his followers with a clearer understanding of the sales direction he had in mind and what it would require from each of them. Moreover, he also requested my help with the leadership issues he was struggling with – how to lead his team more effectively, how to become a better leader and how to understand his followers better.

Adam and I formulated the following clear objectives for the coming coaching sessions, which are in line with Gregory et al. (2011):

1. *Improving and clarifying Adam's communication skills. This also included learning to intervene in interpersonal conflicts.* The effectiveness of his communications before and after the coaching would be measured by both pre-session interviews and end-of-session team interviews that would assess his abilities.
2. *Creating a more positive attitude, supportive working environment and trust.* These qualities too would be assessed with pre- and end-of-session interviews.
3. *Inspiring the team to attain better performance results.* This would also be assessed in the aforementioned interviews.

My personal goal as coach was to arrange a one-on-one interview with each member of the team, to accompany each sales professional on a customer visit and to help them increase their recorded number of visits. Each of these goals was possible to measure by interviews before and after the coaching project.

3. Coaching process

On 8 May 2015, I sent Adam an email outlining my proposals for how our work together could proceed. We started by enhancing the identity of Company A. For the rest of May and June 2015, our work together concentrated on assessing the company goals. We took a holiday break in July and began again in August with a two-day seminar for all the 50 key personnel. The aim was to present the participants with the same objectives listed above and similarly compare their suggestions for how to achieve them with those of the company leadership. This exercise was intended to commit everyone to the same vision, a shared new Company A in which digital services would be the centre of operations. The participants in the seminar were also asked to bring along something that had special meaning to them in terms of their most important value. After each participant had presented the object and explained the value it represented to the others, the objects were assembled together as a 'totem pole'. This totem pole collection was later transported to Company A's lobby, to represent the seminar participants' shared vision for the company and their can-do attitude.

After the completion of this two-day seminar, I continued holding coaching sessions for his sales unit, the 50 key personnel as needed, and for him personally in one-on-one sessions several times a week. The timeframe would be the last four months of 2015, extending the period of my coaching work for the company to a total of eight months.

I was physically present at Company A a minimum of two or three days a week. At the beginning of the coaching project, I interviewed all 13 members of Adam's sales team, Adam included. Regular one-on-one sessions were then scheduled for Adam and myself at the office, over the phone or in the form of a shared workout. We went running together once a week, and we attended a spinning class and used the gym on two occasions.

During my time spent at the company, I primarily sat in on customer visits when the salespersons were selling advertising space. I would accompany the salespersons on their trips to meet with customers, and monitor the conversation closely in order to make verbatim notes. Back at the office, we would go through what had transpired: how the conversation had gone, the point at which the customer had begun to take an interest in purchasing ads and the way the salesperson had handled this interest. If the visit was unsuccessful, we discussed what could perhaps be done differently and the steps or countermeasures to take to prevent the same situation from reoccurring. I tried to focus primarily on praising, identifying successful moments and helping the person realize her/his strengths. I deliberately attempted get the sales representatives to feel that they were successful in their work and were knowledgeable and professional. After our meetings, they always tried harder: their contacting rates were higher and, according to their own accounts, their motivation to come to work seemed better.

In addition, I also utilized this one-on-one time with the sales representatives to ask them to share any concerns or questions they might have and assist them with such activities as contacting and prioritizing

customers, preparing for customer visits, drawing up offers and follow-up customer care. Beyond this, I participated in the weekly sales team meeting and the planning of the company's customer events. After customer meetings, I held a brief discussion with Adam about the challenges and actions required to support the salesperson in question. Everybody in the team knew about this procedure.

The very first thing I did was to ask Adam to start holding regular Monday morning meetings. Every week began with a get-together where information was delivered. Adam and I also had a one-to-one discussion about his concerns and needs. He also began to follow-up his tasks and open issues. We also reserved time in his calendar for 'speed dating', i.e. meeting his team members, and for physical exercise. This usually occurred in the morning after 6:30. Adam also began to reflect on his working days by writing in his notebook. As a result, he started to perceive the interpersonal conflict situations and their causes.

My coaching engagement at Company A lasted from 13 May 2015 to 18 December 2015. After this official period was over, I visited the team again in January and February 2016 to gauge the team's development. I also participated in the recruitment of a new sales director, after Adam requested that I support him in that process. After the project was over, I continued to meet with Adam to work out. During these weekly sessions, we would often talk about the challenges he was facing. We still meet on occasion for shared walks. Our conversations continue to touch on leadership and how to develop and succeed in this area.

4. Coaching techniques

The email I sent at the beginning of the coaching period also included some identity-related questions for Adam to answer with images. The questions were as follows:

- a) What is the current state of Company A? Choose an image you would use to depict the situation of your employer right now.
- b) What is your vision for Company A? What is your dream when it comes to Company A? Where do you see its future? Choose an image that reveals these things.
- c) What is Company A's most important value, independent of the project or people in question? Choose an image that portrays this value.
- d) What is the personality of Company A? Choose an image that shows most clearly what kind of personality the company projects.

Once I received the answers, we began our work. First, we defined the company's identity. Then we mapped out where the firm was now and where it was going to. Next, we determined the core values that were intended to support the company and carry it forward.

The questions I asked Adam to answer before we started our work together were also designed to make him conscious of any deviance between his own views and values and those of the company. As it turned out, Adam's answers were very much in line with the company answers, which he had enquired about while he was completing his own task.

Regularly given positive feedback

My work as a coach involved giving Adam positive oral and written feedback every day we worked together. He also gave feedback to me. In addition, I praised him and called special attention to his successes. In return, I required that Adam practise the same habit with his co-workers. I suggested that Adam play a praising game with his team members every Monday morning when starting the week. After going through the sales pipeline, he was to ask everybody to praise their co-worker for one minute. In the beginning, the members of the sales team found this very childish and boring. Nevertheless, after a month it had become a habit and created much positive energy in the team. A year later, when visiting the team for a follow-up, I heard that this game had been temporarily abandoned after a new sales manager had taken over, but the team had pressed for its reintroduction. Consequently, the new sales manager had reintroduced the practice because it gave them a "positive kick" to start the week.

Verbal transformation

During client meetings, when presenting offers together with his followers, or in feedback situations, Adam began to practise using words like "and" instead of "but" and describing his needs when he wished his followers to change something in their everyday behaviour, such as using new software. Moreover, I had asked Adam not to use "but" after describing something positive. This became a 'joke' among the team members: During their meetings the team started to shout "no buts, only ands" if Adam accidentally said, for example, "it was professional work both visually and content-wise but...".

- 1) Using AND instead of BUT. When Adam was giving feedback in front of the whole sales team or one-to-one, I asked him to replace BUT with AND in comments like "you built an excellent report, **but** next time I would like you to pay attention to being even more precise". I also asked him to be mindful of his habit of checking his phone or the clock while speaking. He needed to give the impression of being fully present and interested in his team members in order to increase trust and create confidence. Thus, there was no place for glancing at his phone; instead, he was to give his followers and the matter at hand his exclusive attention
- 2) Prefacing advice or instructions with "I need you to" instead of "you should" is also a preferred way of communicating.

During our one-on-one sessions, I showed Adam my written memorandums from the meetings I had observed as examples of when he had used “you should”, which sounded like a command, and the difference it made when he said “I need you to” instead.

As a coach, I cannot expect these turns of phrase from my clients without using them myself. For example, when Adam’s concentration would fail, I would remind him to regain focus by saying “I need you to concentrate.” Framing the message in this way avoids any unnecessary feelings of obligation or blame.

- 3) Learning to say “I hear what you are saying” when someone shares his or her concerns. This change goes hand-in-hand with avoiding phrases like “you always” or “you never”. Adam started to use this immediately during his regular Monday meetings with the team. He said it gave him time to think without making the other party feel rejected.
- 4) Responding to propositions with “may I build on this?” If Adam wanted to add something when his team members proposed an idea, he was to start by saying “may I build on this?” to ensure that the team member in question felt that the response was intended to develop that idea, thus giving it value. While he was in action and talking, I even dared to interrupt him if he failed to use this phrase and build on the idea further.

When observing Adam, a situation once arose in which his actions directly affected the motivation of one of his most successful sales representatives and by extension impacted the weekly profits. The climate in the office had been strained ever since the CFO had ‘walked by’ one day to ask how it was going. Adam anxiously tried to improve sales in the unit, since the company’s future depended to a large degree on their success. When Daniela, the team’s top salesperson and also a single mother, informed him that she needed to take her child to the doctor and might be gone the whole day, Adam answered tersely, “I guess you need to go then”, Daniela grew upset, as she had expected Adam to show interest in her child and extend some sympathy. His curt reply made her gloomy, and her sales figures decreased for the next two weeks.

Daniela later approached me and asked if I could talk to Adam about the situation. Daniela found herself feeling resentful towards Adam because she had high expectations of him. She had seen him be inspirational and knew he could be a good listener, but this was suddenly not the case with her. Daniela felt she was receiving no support, even though Adam had underlined the value of mutual support within the team at the two-day training session.

Before she could do her best for the company, it was also extremely important for Daniela to feel that her supervisor cared about her well-being. However, their short exchange had given her the impression that Adam was disappointed and disapproved of her. It became a matter of values for Daniela,

thereby escalating the conflict beyond the original issue of taking her child to the doctor. She even considered resigning, as it was important to her that the values of the company matched her own. The company advocated a good balance between work and home life for both men and women, and this had become a fundamental issue for Daniela, who valued the opportunity to combine her work and single parenting in a reasonable way. Consequently, Daniela found herself in interpersonal conflict situation with Adam, who had started to become irritated by Daniela's behaviour.

I proposed that Daniela should go to Adam directly and tell him about her feelings instead of delivering her message to me. I was sure Adam had not meant to be so curt. I promised to support her, but told her it would be best if she took up the issue herself. After couple of days, Daniela was feeling better and full of enthusiasm to work with her customers again. As a result, her sales figures began to increase. Daniela had asked Adam to meet and discuss the incident, and Adam had finally taken the time to listen. Daniela left the meeting with the feeling that her ideas and concerns were heard and taken into account. Adam told me later that he had been completely unaware that his actions had been interpreted as terse and uncaring. He had quickly answered "of course" while concentrating on something else. Without noticing it, however, his voice and body language had given off a signal he did not intend to express. He had been aware of a change of Daniela's behaviour, felt there was irritation between them, and noticed how her sales figures had decreased, but he had simply not had the opportunity to intervene. In addition, he found talking with Daniela uncomfortable. Adam said there was "simply no time", but I had another opinion about it. I informed him that he should have taken time to resolve the situation immediately after recognizing Daniela's decreasing sales figures. He had lost two weeks because he did not want to intervene and feel "uncomfortable". Adam agreed.

In addition, an interpersonal conflict situation had occurred with another salesperson, Emily, who had wanted to become a sales manager after being a team leader. Adam had explained to her the reasons why she had not been accepted to this position, but he had not given her an opportunity to reflect and defend herself. Emily explained to me how the "case was closed", although she still wanted to return to the matter. Emily had begun to feel that Adam never had time for her and that he avoided discussions with her; finally, Emily had started to dislike and lose respect for Adam. Whatever Adam instructed Emily to accomplish, Emily was unwilling to obey. A conflict had thus occurred between them, although Adam was reluctant to admit it. This had led to a situation where some team members took Emily's side when Adam required them, for example, to mark their sales on the white board. One morning, when all the sales figures should have been on the whiteboard, those team members who supported Emily refused to enter their sales data. An interpersonal conflict situation that had been left unresolved had thus started to evolve. When interviewing Emily, she admitted to being angry and unmotivated to work. When asked about Adam, Emily remarked, "He leaves things behind him without wanting to resolve them". When I asked Adam

to resolve this situation, he replied that “there is nothing to be resolved . . . case closed”.

Working out

I assigned Adam the objective of working out three times a week. He already played a ball sport once a week, and he added a weekly cycling trip or walk to meet this quota. In addition, we regularly met once a week to go running or work out together at the gym. Furthermore, he started to plan a half marathon and included exercise in each of his team members’ weekly schedule. Adam started to sleep longer at night, and the quality of his sleep also improved: he no longer awoke in the middle of the night.

Keeping a diary

I asked Adam to keep a diary during our entire coaching period, and he was successful at regularly writing down his thoughts and daily activities in a notebook. I never asked to look at it, preferring to let it remain his own personal ‘pouring out of the soul’. Nevertheless, we would occasionally refer to it during our morning runs or exercises. He was eager to find solutions, developing his own personality to find reasons for his behaviour when facing interpersonal conflicts. The notebook became an important technique for him to reflect on his growth.

5. Outcomes

How did Adam react to interpersonal conflict situations after the coaching period? As the earlier example shows, he had previously shunned conflicts, preferring not even to see them. De Church and Marks (2001) describe this kind of management behaviour as “avoiding”. During the coaching period, Adam nevertheless developed his willingness to confront these difficult situations. For example, after our eight-month coaching period was over, Adam once called me to recount how he had realized that he had slighted a colleague and had been brave enough to raise the matter immediately and apologize. He told me he had not even recognized such problems with his colleagues before I had coached him, although they had obviously been there, as was evident from his issues with Daniela, Emily and some others, which had also been invisible to him. Nonetheless, after eight months of coaching he had begun to take such cases up by himself, calling himself a “wooden eye” for being so blind and insensitive to these individuals’ needs. He was ashamed and wanted to become better at sensing and understanding his followers.

In my opinion, this demonstrated his development towards becoming a more transformational leader: someone who can reflect on his own behaviour and consciously work on learning more beneficial habits and discarding old ones. Instead of continuing to avoid conflict situations, he wanted to develop as a leader and experiment with new approaches, such as reaching out and

apologizing to someone he had offended. Adam was thus able to make his concern for his followers more individualized.

In order to explain what I think instigated this willingness to change, this transformation, I return to the dialogue at the beginning of this section, in which Adam admitted that he did not know why he was unable to demand more of himself. Recall that he later said he had made a habit of staying quiet when new project management duties were distributed in executive team meetings to avoid being labelled a difficult person. In Company A, Adam felt he played the role of a person who was constantly innovating and inventing new business ideas, but when it came to implementation, no one was willing to take responsibility for executing these new projects. For this reason, he decided to hold his tongue instead of demanding that the other managers take charge.

In my view, the conversation below reveals the underlying reason why Adam found it difficult to make decisions and feared being seen as difficult. It also shows why he was eventually willing to make changes to remedy the problem:

Me: You stayed quiet?

Adam: Yes.

Me: Why? What could have happened if you had commented?

Adam: Nothing bad, but I just don't like that feeling.

Me: What do you mean by "that feeling"?

Adam: If I open my mouth, I become difficult.

Me: Difficult? What do you mean?

Adam: The others think I'm demanding and adding to their workload again.

Me: Does that affect your feelings somehow?

Adam: I feel down, like I'm being seen as the bad guy again.

Me: What do you think your peers think of you?

Adam: I think they think I am being difficult.

Me: So you think you are not seen as the nice and easy-going guy you want to be anymore.

Adam: It's quite demanding to have a reputation for being difficult. It would be nice to get things done smoothly, so the whole organization would feel good about everything.

Me: Like in a dream, right? Do you mean you don't want to hurt anyone?

Adam: No, I don't want to hurt anyone.

Me: So you stay quiet to avoid being thought of as a troublemaker?

Adam: Yes.

Me: Why? What need are you fulfilling by staying docile, if your primary goal is to get things done at work and help the organization succeed? How do you think you could help if you remain quiet?

Adam: Well, I wish I could answer that.

Me: How does it feel to be difficult?

Adam: Well, it does not feel pleasant.

Me: So this means you try to avoid feelings that are unpleasant?

Adam: Well, don't you think everyone does? No one wants to be seen as difficult.

Me: I don't know. I can't help feeling that your choices are more about pleasing others. What do you think?

Adam: Maybe.

Me: Why do you do this?

Adam: I guess I want to be the nice guy, the one who plays fair and is easy going.

Me: I hear you. At the same time, I can see you trying to please others in a way that prevents your team from being successful. You can't please everybody. Why should you? It's a bit the same as bicycling in low gear all the time instead of turning up the resistance. It makes it easier for you.

Adam: Well, yes, it does.

Me: I can see you are motivated to please others. Who did you please when you were a child?

Adam: My mother and my sister, actually.

Me: All children want to please their parents, but why did you want to please your sister? Was there a particular reason?

Adam: I guess it is because I survived the accident better than she did.

Adam then described a dramatic car accident he had experienced as child with his mother and sister. He explained that he had been the least injured in the crash, and for this reason he wanted to please his sister and show that he was thankful for having survived the incident better than she did. In my opinion, this was one of the fundamental reasons Adam found it hard to make decisions, intervene in conflicts and even acknowledge the disagreements and discontent that may have surrounded him. He had a deep-seated desire to please everyone, so he 'wiped away' conflicts. His way of showing gratitude for making it through a traumatic childhood experience better than the rest of his family was being positive, not even seeing anything negative, especially not conflicts. This is, of course, just one side of the truth and only my interpretation; nonetheless, I still believe that when Adam became aware of this, he was capable of changing his behaviour.

Our first goal of *improving and clarifying communication* was achieved after Adam began to lead regular team meetings once a week, no longer cancelling or rescheduling them for other engagements. An agenda was drawn up for each weekly meeting, and measures were taken to stick to the agenda within the time allotted. He was not, however, able to tackle his email response time successfully. He cleaned out his email account and attempted to answer emails on the same day he received them, but said he was unable to stay on top of it due to his work load during office hours. Consequently, he went through his emails at home, in the evening.

Our second goal was to *create a positive attitude and a supportive atmosphere* in the sales team. This was goal somewhat fulfilled in that the team did regain a more optimistic and determined spirit, which was confirmed by the team's improved results for 2016. One way we achieved this was by introducing acknowledgment and praise to the weekly Monday sales team meetings: Adam asked his team members to finish each meeting by thanking and commending the person standing next to them for one minute.

More time would have been needed, however, for improving trust between Adam and the employees working under him. The string of operational and strategic changes that had been introduced in Company A, in addition to the launch of new performance monitoring software, made the situation in the sales team quite chaotic and confusing. This company-wide transformation and instability made it harder for Adam and his team to work towards improved levels of confidence and mutual trust.

Our third objective was to *motivate the team to achieve better results*, and here too we were only partially successful. Results improved by several metrics: the number of customer visits increased and the volume of mid-

sized ad space that was sold also grew. We utilized tangible methods to prompt and track these improvements: marking customer visit targets on the calendar, boosting performance monitoring and introducing fun competitions. However, it remains unclear whether these things really did inspire and motivate the team to embrace the new working procedures and digital products. Nevertheless, clarifying the sales team targets and how sales are registered, along with the regular monitoring of sales performance, no doubt served to increase the number of customer visits, which improved sales.

Adam's ability to reflect on his actions and overcome his avoidance of conflict began to improve over the coaching period. He was able to bravely start resolving conflicts and dealing with their consequences. He also began taking active steps to correct his avoidance behaviour. At the start of our journey, he had asked me to help him prioritize his work tasks and respond to pressing issues within the same working day, improve his problem-solving capabilities and demonstrate to his followers that he was someone who listens.

His post-coaching response to an altercation with a colleague is a good example of his evolution in conflict avoidance. When Adam became aware that he had offended someone on the executive team, he immediately asked to meet privately with this person, iron out the misunderstanding, and apologize. Moreover, he went even further in his response, asking about the person's needs and if he could help in any way. Adam also clearly tried to increase the time he spent talking with his sales team members one-on-one. During these sessions, he asked his followers for feedback about his management: what they thought he should be doing and anything they thought he should be doing differently. He recognized his need to become a better leader, and he was willing to go out of his comfort zone in order to do so.

One of the areas in which Adam clearly experienced discomfort was in asking his manager colleagues to assume responsibility for new projects and ensuring that they saw them through. Another issue he had difficulties with was prioritizing time for his followers, as this often meant saying no to something else. Sticking to a regular team meeting schedule and adding 'me time' to his weekly calendar began to show results, but even so, he was unable to find time for quick 'speed dates' with employees who needed to speak with him. If he cleared an hour on his calendar, it was usually filled by something Company A's peer leaders asked him to investigate. Adam's awareness of his time limitations began to become very clear to him as my coaching progressed, and for this reason, he decided to recruit a new sales director to assume responsibility for the day-to-day operations of the sales team.

When I began the coaching project with Adam, he avoided being decisive if this risked him being seen as a difficult leader. For instance, in the example described earlier, he explained how he preferred to leave issues unclear in the management team if making a firm decision meant his being seen as an awkward person. The same underlying tendency was also evident in his

reluctance to see the interpersonal conflicts surrounding him, even if he had been their cause. In his words, he “eliminated” the situation before it became a conflict. Nevertheless, this attitude was itself a cause of conflicts.

During the eight-month coaching process, Adam’s behaviour certainly developed. He began to work on his own identity by reflecting on his needs, thoughts and behaviour and asking himself how he thought his followers viewed him. He also began to demand better performances from himself and even started to consider career development.

In addition, Adam decided to begin tackling unpleasant tasks, such as cleaning out his office email box, responding to emails within a certain time and responding to conflicts, and he resolved to continue bravely talking about and describing his own perspectives in management team meetings.

In conclusion, the coaching helped Adam transform his executive behaviour in several ways. A traumatic childhood experience had made Adam’s tendency to please everyone a central part of his personality. He became aware of this – although I made clear that I was not a therapist and that I always guide my clients, if they so wish, to professional therapists. As a result of this tendency, Adam feared being labelled as difficult and therefore avoided conflicts.

In Case A, the various coaching tools, exercises to clarify identity and joint physical workouts seemed to have had the greatest effect. Adam was able to form an understanding of his leadership performance and get to the bottom of why he always wanted to be ‘a nice guy’ and the problems it created. He took major strides in his own personal development, as he realized how much he could potentially contribute and how he could better motivate his team. The greatest change during the coaching was the manner in which he dealt with conflicts, as towards the end of the period he showed the ability and willingness to intervene in them and make amends.

As previously mentioned, a year from the start of our first coaching session, Adam called me to describe how he had, for the first time, intervened in an interpersonal conflict situation which had occurred between him and one of his management team members. Adam had invited this person to meet him, apologized for his behaviour and wanted to hear the other party’s opinion. Adam had also expressed the need to resolve this conflict. He was very pleased about being capable of intervening and acting in a new way.

4.2 Ben The Empathizer

This section focuses on presenting Ben, the CEO of a company representing the energy industry. Ben sought to develop his conflict resolution skills and clarify his own and his management team’s communication skills. In this section, the impact of the coaching techniques and Ben’s progress are also presented.

Background

Company B, a firm in the energy industry, was classified as a middle size corporation according to European Union criteria. It had approximately 40–60 employees, and for the last two years, it had been unprofitable. The company language was English, and the company included employees from five countries. The company was in the middle of a transformation: a new product needed to be finalized and the organization developed accordingly.

1. Leader's personality and leadership style

The agenda for one of the coaching sessions concerned different leadership styles. I explained passive and active leadership and asked Ben which he considered was closest to his own approach. When he answered that he felt he was very transformational, I challenged him: how could he consider himself a transformational leader when he was unable to make the necessary decisions to dismiss a person whose influence to the organization was clearly detrimental? The following conversation occurred after I had asked why it was so difficult to make decisions in some cases:

Ben: First of all, I need to know specific details about the subject before making a decision and the fact that it has consequences that are difficult to foresee.

Me: Why can't you use experts to help or . . . ?

Ben: Yes, but still – there is still the question of responsibility and me being CEO means I'm the one who bears the consequences.

Me: What kind of influence would be the worst after you have made your decision?

Ben: To make the life of another person more difficult and influence their mind negatively.

Me: In what way?

Ben: If I lay off an employee, it will have consequences for his whole family and it may influence that person's life and his mind very deeply. He may carry that feeling with him the rest of his life.

Ben described himself as “old school man”, meaning that a matter that had been agreed and confirmed with a handshake constituted a firm agreement that he was duty-bound to keep. He considered himself simultaneously introvert and extrovert. He also described himself as a “person who gets worked up quickly”, meaning he lost his temper easily. This was true to an extent, although he did not shout or completely lose his calm; he simply

increased the volume and pace of his speech and prevented others from interrupting. He was a leader who encouraged his followers in one-to-one discussions to perform their job better; he adopted the style of a coach to approach his followers, and he was ready to listen and find a suitable way to work for each of them. Ben proved to be an approachable, brilliant expert who was able to convince clients and financiers with his professional knowledge and ability to listen. People felt it was easy to talk with him, and at the factory he always had time to put his own work aside and listen to what his followers had to say.

An outsider would consider Ben very sympathetic, like a ‘teddy bear’ who would help on any occasion, and this was also the case: Ben had a very strong empathic ability to understand others’ problems and challenges. For example, he never required a person to come to work if that person had family issues to take care of. Moreover, his followers and management team members shared the very same opinion about him.

However, Ben’s tendency for extreme empathy was a challenge for the company, as Ben was unwilling to dismiss employees who either neglected their work or negatively influenced other key workers by talking scornfully and about other members of staff either behind their backs or to their face. Such talk had led to several interpersonal conflict situations, and before I began my coaching work three key persons had already left because of the inappropriate behaviour of two other employees.

What was lacking in Ben was the ability to follow-up, lead his management team, make decisions, tackle substandard performance, monitor the achievements of followers and communicate successes. Ben found intervening in interpersonal conflict situations uncomfortable, especially when he knew the person’s past. In addition, the management team suffered from a lack of structure: One of the major reasons why Ben did not remember to inform his followers of ongoing issues was simply the absence of an agenda and a clear structure for his meetings. Ben had simply been too overloaded.

Ben thus primarily adopted a strongly *laissez-faire* leadership style, although he was also able to perform a transformational leadership style (Bass & Riggio 2006; Northouse 2016). His followers confirmed these descriptions when I interviewed them. Ben’s way of leading confused both his followers and me, as he seemed to adopt a more active, transformational leadership style when I was at present. However, in my absence, his followers explained that he “lost his energy” and began to perform a more *laissez-faire* leadership style. Ben also recognized this himself – it was nothing new for him. He admitted that he tended to prioritize things differently when I was absent; moreover, he was less organized in his work. He also claimed to have more courage to take the initiative when I was present as a supporter. In addition, he had the tendency of comparing himself to how he had been in previous workplaces in the role of a leader. In his present position as CEO, he felt exhausted by the huge burden he was forced to carry alone. According to Ben, the management team offered scant support. Ben was left alone.

Ben needed to gain back his strength, and enhance communication within the management team in order to support the transformation of production and also clarify roles to reduce his own burden. In addition, he needed support to resolve 'some' on-going interpersonal conflict situations, which had existed for almost a year before I began coaching him and his management team.

2. Focal problem and coaching goals

I began my coaching after the very first meeting. We agreed on the following goals and clear objectives:

1. *To enhance the CEO's leadership ability and personal communication skills to improve his overall performance.* This included learning to resolve interpersonal conflicts.
2. To clarify the executive team's internal communications.
3. To improve the general in-house communications of the company.

The assessments were to be made by interview, and my personal goal as coach was to support the CEO to enhance his self-esteem and increase his courage to intervene in interpersonal conflicts. In addition, I also needed to discover how to help the CEO in effective time management.

When I visited the factory for the first time, I immediately understood the root of the problem: the factory faced challenges with its facilities, the area was too small for the machines and nobody seemed to care about maintaining the plant. I also encountered a serious incident when I walked through the factory: a tool was thrown from behind a truck by a factory worker venting his anger. This could never be allowed to happen again, as it was a sign of extremely poor management in the factory.

The challenges were clear: Ben had adopted partly a laissez-faire leadership style and was unwilling to intervene in the failures of the plant manager in order to respect plan managers role. Leadership was weak at both levels. It was clear that middle management was failing to take appropriate responsibility. An incident like the one I witnessed could have occurred at the factory at any time and caused serious damage or injury.

I began my assessment by interviewing 24 employees, after which I interviewed a further three. This helped me better understand the company's processes, the kind of communication that was occurring and why it sometimes failed. I wanted to hear the perspectives of as many employees as possible about such things as the company's in-house communications, sales, general business phenomena such as marketing, management and decision-making, and their view as to what parts were not working and were therefore responsible for faulty products or delays.

It soon became clear that some of the most crucial obstacles to success were the CEO's inability to make decisions and intervene in conflict situations:

Sometimes I get the feeling that when we should be able to make the decisions right away, it takes weeks instead. It happened once in December, when I needed to go over the heads of some colleagues after having asked them several times to order some materials and some tools, which were never ordered. I decided to buy them myself before the New Year. This caused a problem and I found myself in an (interpersonal) conflict situation. (A management team member)

I also suggested organizing an event to present the results of these interviews to the staff alongside a plan for responding to requests and wishes for improvements. Two separate events were arranged, since the factory worked on three shifts. Ben wanted ensure that everybody was informed about this project and that their voice was heard and taken into account, which is in line with a key aspect of transformational leadership: the notion of individual consideration (Bass & Riggio 2006).

To be able to answer the needs of the management team, who felt they received insufficient information, we introduced weekly newsletters from the CEO. In addition, we also decided to hold regular, prearranged management team meetings. Management groups were also given a permanent agenda and the management team discussed meeting practices, including how long each person should speak and the importance of preparing for the meeting in advance rather than reading the meeting materials during the meeting.

Ben needed to further enhance the communication of the management team in order to support the transformation of production. To achieve this goal, he also required support to resolve 'some' long-running interpersonal conflict situations. When I participated in the management team meetings, members would sometimes stop following the meeting and begin to do something completely different. Some turned on their computers and began surfing, others read emails. This needed to change, and therefore I suggested that Ben assign a role to everyone in the meetings to encourage them to take more responsibility. They were also required to take turns answering random questions. This prevented the participants from starting to 'wander'; instead, they remained focused and adopted the roles assigned to them.

3. Coaching process

Ben and I first met on 17 February 2016, after which he decided to begin a coaching process with me, and we agreed on the immediate tasks he should perform during the next week to unburden his workload. This also included five-minutes of exercise every other morning and a massage, as he suffered from serious back problems. Ben also immediately informed management team members and followers of our discussions about his need to focus on interpersonal conflicts. We first made a contract for 6 months, after which the contract was extended.

I began the project by confidentially interviewing 24 employees. This helped me better understand the firm's processes, the kind of communication that was occurring and why it sometimes failed. While the company had

been growing rapidly, time had been available for little more than solving problems and developing products. This was clearly seen in the company culture, as employees felt like nobody was interested in what they were doing.

At the end of each interview, I compiled a personal to-do list for each individual. It listed things they should observe and the tasks they should perform. In addition, I wrote down each person's wish list of the actions and conditions that could make their own work more efficient. These lists were presented to the CEO at the end of every interview day along with a written version of the list, which was sent to the CEO as an email named "To-do lists". This list was to be followed by both the CEO and CFO.

I also suggested organizing an event to present the results of these interviews to the staff alongside a plan for responding to requests and wishes for improvements. Two separate events were arranged, since the factory worked on three shifts. Ben wanted ensure that everybody was informed about this project and being respected. The most efficient way of doing this was to present the results of my interviews anonymously.

It soon became clear that one member of staff – an employee who had caused several interpersonal conflicts – had been left to his own devices because everybody who had worked with him, including the CEO, had clashed with him. This needed to be resolved. Everyone was aware of the situation, and it also arose in the interviews:

One of the sales guys has been here for one year without selling anything, can you believe it? (One of the Product Designers)

In addition, other obstacles also needed to be overcome, such as the lack of support and regular contact among management team members, the absence of clear role descriptions, and poor in-house communication. Moreover, conflicts between some team members had rendered them incapable of performing their work duties.

I formulated a project plan with the CEO to fulfil all the needs, which had been raised during the interviews. I also compiled a follow-up list, which we followed on a weekly basis until January 2017, when I moved to Southampton for six months. From February 2017 until August 2017, we had regular phone conversations and held one-to-one meetings on the three occasions when I visited Finland. The total duration of my coaching project was 24 months, from February 2016 until February 2018. The first 11 months included regular visits to the company and factory, participating in meetings, observing one-to-one meetings with the CEO and coaching middle managers who worked in the factory. I assigned them development tasks which were followed by the plant manager, whom I contacted regularly to discover how the tasks had been accomplished. The last 13 months included observing the performance of the factory when visiting the company, which happened only three times, and one-to-one meetings and phone conversations with the CEO.

The very first thing Ben and I did was clarify his calendar and his time management. He was so overwhelmed by his workload that he had failed to complete or follow up on several issues. We began by prioritizing and delegating. In addition, recruiting new employees was included in the first phase of actions to reduce Ben's workload.

4. Coaching techniques

During the very first meeting, I posed the identity questions about vision, mission, position, promise, personality and values (as presented in earlier section 3.2.2 Coaching process and empirical materials) to Ben. It transpired that he avoided dreams of the future to avoid disappointment. I asked him if this affected the company's clarity of vision and communication, and he realized it did. His vision and direction for the company were not clearly communicated to the entire staff – the leader had a fear of dreaming and being a visionary, although he was extremely professional at it. Instead, Ben's vision was only discussed and dealt with in the management team. This situation needed to be remedied.

In order to do so, Ben proposed arranging an event where he would tell the entire staff about his vision and the results of the interviews and inform everyone about the changes he wished to introduce to achieve this vision. The results from the interviews made unpleasant reading for the CEO, but he nevertheless wished to announce them. Moreover, one of the goals set for Company B was intervening in the challenges, which had been identified during the interviews I conducted. Ben's willingness to publically discuss the current situation and his own failure represented a crucial change in his behaviour. Seeing the results of the interviews made him aware of his tendency to prevaricate and avoid intervening in interpersonal conflict situations. He was ready to change these tendencies.

Regularly given positive feedback

It was easy for Ben to give positive feedback to his followers in one-to-one meetings. However, he was unfamiliar with praising his followers in front of others. This needed to be changed. Consequently, we introduced the habit of sending a weekly letter from the CEO, including information from different departments and also thanking and praising different teams for succeeding in their goals. The weekly letter received very positive feedback.

Verbal transformation

1) As Ben wanted to change the clarity and manner of his communication, we immediately started practising using words such as "and" instead of "but", which he had already started to practise before our coaching process started. We practised this in every conversation and especially when I read him the memorandums of the meetings I had been following. I had observed the management team meetings and written down the conversations to show

Ben how he behaved. While listening to the transcript of his conversations in these meetings, Ben realized how often he used the phrase “yes it is a good idea, but”. Ben was eager to change this habit, and he was also keen to challenge himself verbally. During the first year, Ben began to correct himself when he used “but” by saying “I mean ‘and’”, and he was thus able to laugh at himself. I interpreted this as a sign that Ben was indeed committed to changing his behaviour and way of communicating and to developing himself.

2) Prefacing advice or instructions with “I need you to” instead of “You should”. During our very first meeting in February 2016, Ben and I also agreed that he would immediately begin to experiment with the use of the word “need” in conversations with his followers when trying to resolve an interpersonal conflict. I received the following email from Ben after sending him a to-do list:

Your suggestion of approaching with the word “need” has been at the back of my mind. I have been wondering how to continue after the beginning and what kind of questions I need to pose to make them talk. The question could easily turn into “what do you want?” and at a poor level of English, the words need and want are reasonably similar, although they create different outcomes.

Sincerely,

Ben

This message immediately revealed three things to me. First, Ben was a person who needed a lot of time for reflection and analytical thinking. He also used writing as a tool for reflecting: his emails were long and analytical. Second, although he was also clearly ready to try new techniques, their implementation might not be immediately successful and thus required time. This was a sign that a longer coaching period was needed. Third, Ben needed to organize his workload and required support from an outsider to arrange his working days and appointments. After this email, I sent Ben my proposal for both the cost and the way of proceeding. My reward in this coaching process was tied to achieving our jointly established goals.

3) Learning to say “I hear what you are saying” when someone shares his or her concerns or ideas. Ben started to use this phrase in management team meetings, which, instead of reacting immediately, gave him time to reflect while not handing the floor to anybody else. Sometimes when the conversation was very hectic and I was sitting next to him, I gave him a piece of paper saying, “I hear what you are saying”. This helped to remind him not to react hastily, and consequently the conversations were easier to end and keep on track.

In the beginning, Ben often became irritated, causing him to ignore what had just been said and to decide to act differently. This caused annoyance and even anger in the management team meetings. One of the members became

so frustrated about working with the CEO that she was barely capable of coming to work.

4) Responding to propositions with “may I build on this?” when dealing with a situation about which Ben had a completely opposite opinion, which was often the case. Ben’s way of reacting hastily caused immediate irritation, especially among two management team members. It was not unknown for Ben and the sales director to raise their voices and almost shout at each other during the management team meeting. Thus, Ben’s way of performing caused anger and interpersonal conflicts.

I once witnessed a situation where the purchasing manager and sales director entered into an argument following a management team meeting. We were in the corridor putting on our coats and preparing to leave and continue developing the company’s vision at a separate venue, when the sales director asked the CEO to sign a letter of intent that – in opposition to the agreed process – had not been approved by the purchasing manager. When the CEO indicated his assent, the purchasing manager grew angry.

According to the purchasing manager, it was unheard of for two senior managers – one the CEO – to contravene jointly agreed process models and thereby endanger the company’s profitability. The purchasing manager maintained that all letters of intent needed to go through him, as a new project spread sheet had to be created for calculating the margin and budgeting expenses. Only in this way could he ensure that the potential project’s material costs would not exceed its revenue. The sales director responded by saying there was no time for that, explaining that the letter of intent needed be signed as soon as possible so as to “strike while the iron was hot” and keep the client satisfied. The purchasing manager then became irate and began to shout at the other two men. The sales director took a few steps back and fell silent, and the CEO also withdrew and said nothing – knowing from the previous “attacks” there was nothing to be done. The purchasing manager grew more furious and began to call the sales manager names, saying that he felt walked over, insulted and undervalued. At this, the CEO turned to walk out the door, and the sales director also took his jacket with the intent to leave. It was at this juncture that I decided to intervene.

I approached the purchasing manager and said that the issue was definitely something that must be discussed, and now would be a good time for a break. I put my hand on his shoulder and suggested we all go outside and transfer to our venue for the evening, where we could continue the conversation. The sales director put on his coat and left, together with the rest of the management team. I left with the purchasing manager and proposed going for a short drive so we could talk through the problem together in peace. The purchasing manager felt underappreciated and rejected. According to him, his behaviour was not simply a reaction to this rushed decision on a new project; it was also a response to the accumulation of several similar events.

The purchasing manager explained that he felt his work had no worth, because even the CEO was content with deviating from the agreed process model. He continued to rant and rave about his role and who was ultimately

responsible if a project ended up being under-priced. He also called into question the CEO's competence, as he had such difficulties complying with the rules. He felt that he was being ruthlessly steamrolled by the others in the company. Moreover, he emphasized that the CEO should understand how potentially fatal it is for the company to commit to prices that have yet to be analysed, for, without appropriate analysis, how could they know if a project would be lossmaking or profitable? The purchasing manager was correct in his assessment.

I listened quietly, letting him release his frustration and analyse his own feelings. I acknowledged that I had heard what he was saying and empathized with his situation. I did not challenge him at any point; I simply affirmed his feelings and nodded, and he soon became calmer. Only then did we begin to discuss the possible underlying reasons behind what had occurred. The purchasing manager recognised that it was important to respond quickly and serve the customer. Nevertheless, he wished that the sales director had contacted him first and told him about the opportunity so he could have considered a new solution.

About an hour later, the management team gathered for our next meeting. The purchasing manager walked in and quipped that only the sales director had managed to choose the right appetizer. He then looked at the sales director and smiled. It was his way of apologising. The sales director began to laugh, and everything was fine between them once again, but only for a short period of time: The real reason behind this incident had not been resolved.

I later spoke about the incident with the sales director, who explained that such clashes with the purchasing manager were a rather common occurrence. He said he was used to them, and had long ago decided to not react to them. He accepted the comment on his food choice as apology enough. Thus, he planned on continuing his work as before, as he saw fit, with no regard for the purchasing manager's fits of rage.

The next time I had a meeting with CEO, I spoke about what had happened, and I also broached the subject again the next time we met. The CEO freely admitted that he had not reacted appropriately, as he felt unable to intervene in conflict situation. He did not know what to say or do. He found such incidents unpleasant and somewhat frightening.

I suggested the following:

- Approach the person and rest your hand on their shoulder. Tell them you hear what they are saying.
- Ask forgiveness. The CEO could have said he was sorry for hurriedly and inadvertently agreeing to break with protocol, which made the purchasing manager feel as if his work was undervalued and insignificant.
- Follow up with both parties. The CEO could have brought the incident up again with both parties and then asked them to a joint meeting where the men could present their version of what had transpired.

Ben was nevertheless reluctant to follow these suggestions. He was unwilling to take any action, just as he had avoided bringing the conflict up that night. He justified his choice by mentioning the need to avoid further angry confrontations and expressing his belief that a discussion was unlikely to change things for the better. He had tried several times. In the end, it was swept it under the carpet and forgotten. “There have simply been too many similar occasions”, he said, as if he had already given up.

Working out

Immediately after our first meeting, I had suggested to Ben that he should add at least five minutes of physical activity to his routine every other day because of his back problems. However, Ben failed to adopt my suggestion, as he felt that this would require time he did not have. His days were long indeed. After the summer of 2016, the situation improved, and he even contacted a personal trainer I had recommended. However, their meetings did not continue on a regular basis. Ben played golf, his favourite sport, which was so time-consuming that he was unable to train as often as he should. I also suggested that he work out with me or go for a walk or a jog. Nevertheless, our meetings ended up being held indoors at the desk. However, Ben went to gym every now and then when his timetable was flexible enough.

Keeping a diary

Initially, Ben marked some things in his black notebook. However, at some point, he dropped this habit. Ben was unable to use the diary regularly for reflecting on his own thoughts; it would have simply taken too much of his time. This did not mean that Ben would not have been reflecting his behaviour, on the contrary: His primary way of reflecting was verbal – talking to me – and if I was not available, Ben wrote emails to structure his ideas.

5. Outcomes

With Ben, the first goal was to help him to gain his strength back, and intervene in and resolve interpersonal conflict situations. During the initial interviews, at the beginning of the coaching process in March 2016, over half the interviewees felt that there were interpersonal conflicts in the organization. They described employees “yelling at each other”, “blaming each other for not doing the tasks assigned to them” or “name-calling”. However, when I interviewing these same individuals after the end of the coaching period, this behaviour had changed. “What disputes?” remarked one office worker incredulously, when I asked if the conflicts still existed. “It’s a much more relaxed place now; there are no more major stress factors”, commented another person after reading the transcript of his initial interview, where he had talked about interpersonal conflicts in the

organization. Moreover, a management team member observed, “everything that you wrote down on your to-do list 18 months ago while interviewing me has happened, except for the warehouse. It still has the same junk there”.

The second goal, to enhance the CEO’s personal communication skills and thereby enhance his performance had been achieved. He had begun to use the word “and” instead of “but”, or at least corrected himself immediately after using it. He had also begun to talk about needs instead of becoming annoyed when someone expressed an opinion or made a suggestion about which he did not agree.

Third goal, clarifying the executive team’s internal communications, was also achieved, as they had positively improved in the year and a half since the project began. The weekly electronic newsletter that had been introduced was seen as a highly significant development that demonstrated the company’s commitment to improving its communications. The newsletter was judged to have effectively increased the flow of information and in-house understanding of events at the firm: “The weekly newsletter has made a real difference. It is especially important when things are going well. It gives us a real boost and inspires us to move forward”, said another, member of the management team. However, some challenges remained: “After your instructions, things were right on target at first, but lately things have started to slip. Meetings drag on and on and everyone has plenty of things to say, but there’s not enough decisive decision-making”.

The overall atmosphere at Company B appeared to have improved, and there was a sense that some progress had been made. Everyone at the firm seemed to get along. “It’s nice to come here to work”, remarked one employee, which epitomized the general attitude to this issue. “People are more relaxed than they used to be,” added fourth member of the management team.

Clarification of the organizational structure was seemingly responsible for making the atmosphere more relaxed, despite a few lingering ambiguities. Moving the CEO’s office to the same space where the rest of the office staff worked was seen in the company as a very positive move. The CEO having his own separate office had previously made people feel a stronger sense of hierarchy. “It’s a whole new world compared to 18 months ago”, remarked fifth management team member.

In sum, the communications development project was a positive experience. The company members who participated in the interviews felt that using a coach to develop the firm’s communications was a good move:

The conversations I have had with you have taught me that I shouldn’t keep my mouth shut. It’s good to say how you feel about things once in a while – to let it out. It has also taught me to talk about things while I’m here at work and participating the management team, and think of the other person, too. (A management team member).

Learning to say “I hear what you are saying” when someone shares his or her concerns goes hand-in-hand with avoiding phrases like “you always” or

“you never”. All of the leaders tried this, and Ben found this an extremely positive method in situations where the parties involved did not share the same opinion. This was a focal means for Ben to develop his verbal communication. “It makes me think twice and gives me time before I act reactively”, observed Ben, when describing the benefits of the phrase while having a conversation with a follower.

In order to understand when coachees make a breakthrough in their behaviour, i.e. when they leave some old patterns behind them and accept new ways of behaving, the rest of the discussion introduced at the beginning of this case is presented below. The discussion resumes in the middle of a discussion on dismissing someone and how would it feel for that person to be dismissed:

Me: I believe that it makes a remarkable difference if the dismissed person receives support for the current situation. Even you could offer that support to him. How do you feel about this?

Ben: Well, I guess I have experienced that.

Me: What do you mean?

Ben: I have experience of being the target of anger.

Me: In what way?

Ben: Do you know how it feels to be bullied at school? I have been bullied at school and I decided never to cause similar pain to anyone.

Me: I'm so sorry to hear that.

Ben: It leaves the scars for a lifetime.

Me: I do hear you. And at the same time I'd like to remind you about the differences between being bullied and being dismissed.

Ben: There are no differences; you see, you are singled out and left with a feeling of being unwanted, just like in the process where an employment relationship is terminated and the employee is left as an outsider.

We continued discussing his feelings about how he had felt when he was bullied at school. The subject was very sensitive, still painful after over 40 years. It became very clear to me that this incident had traumatized my coachee and had influenced his behaviour for most of his adult life. This seemed to be one of the moments my coachee became very aware of his old trauma, which had caused the problems in his decision-making, especially when it had involved employees and their future. As I saw it, this was the

moment of transformation; he was finally ready to face these painful memories and take the next step.

After having the conversation described above, the following dismissals were of a different nature: they were still painful, but the process was smoother and quicker. Indeed, an employee from the management team who was required to leave his position for neglecting his tasks thanked Ben for being so concerned and for handling the process with dignity and without delay.

At the end of our time together, Ben summarized the coaching experience in the following way:

You would not think a top manager or executive would need someone to talk to, but we do. We need someone with whom we can reflect on our ideas, someone we can trust completely and from whom we can receive support, someone who sees us and our inner selves, someone with whom we can connect and who guides us to think out of the box. We need someone to coach us to exceed ourselves – but not just anybody. We need somebody who has the experience, who has been there and done that, and who can encourage us to do the same like you have done to me. I just wish I had already been taught to intervene much earlier than at this age.

4.3 Cecil The Warrior

This section focuses on presenting Cecil, the CEO of a company in the new technology industry. He sought to learn to develop his conflict resolution skills and clarify his own and his management team's communication skills. This chapter presented how coaching a dysfunctional leader can fail to produce results.

Background

Company C operated in the new technology sector and was classified as a start-up or small size corporation according to European Union criteria. It had approximately 10–15 employees, and for the last two years, it had been unprofitable. The company language was English, and the firm had employees from three different countries.

1. Leader's personality and leadership style

To better understand my coachees, I usually ask many questions about their families, including how they spend time with each family member, the kind of roles they have at home, and the kind of background that they come from. The very first time we met, I asked Cecil some basic questions about his background and his personality. The discussion below describes Cecil's approach to tasks and people.

Me: How much time do you spend with your children?

Cecil: Of the time I spend with my children, I spend 80 percent with my son and 20 with my daughter.

Me: Why so little time with your daughter?

Cecil: I have more in common with my son. We play sports together. My daughter is a teenager. She doesn't like to spend time with me.

Me: How do you know?

Cecil: She is always in her own room.

Me: You need to get to know your daughter better, so I'll give you some homework. Go to her and ask her how she is doing. Ask her if she needs anything from you. Say something nice; praise her in some way.

Cecil: Why should I?

Cecil was very polite but taciturn and difficult to talk to. He used extremely short sentences; small talk was not for him. He wanted to go immediately to the point with everything; no time was to be wasted on uninteresting conversations. The impression he gave of himself was of a slightly shy person who answered when someone asked something but did not start conversations. In fact, however, he was more like a soldier, a warrior, prepared to vanquish every foe in order to achieve his objectives, whatever the consequences – but without talking about or discussing the matter. His motto was “what has been agreed on shall be accomplished whatever it takes”. This was also the opinion of his management team members. They described him as friendly and nice when not talking about work and duties, but they also depicted him as a leader who failed to listen to the others and took nobody else's opinions into account and was unwilling to change his own opinions. Cecil was also seen as very determined. In a sense, he was in totally the wrong place. He should have been working for the military or as a technology expert.

Cecil was clearly an authoritarian and transactional leader who performed passive management-by-expectation and active management-by-expectation leadership styles (Bass & Riggio 2006; Bass 1990). He materially rewarded his followers according to success, and made clear to them – in front of everybody – who was successful and who was not.

The company was challenged by the fact that it had a very effective, goal driven CEO who was nevertheless incapable of understanding why his employees were unwilling to cooperate with him. In meetings, he would dictate how things would happen and then proceed to march towards the destination on the front line. He had no time to listen to the feelings or

opinions of others in his attack; the main objective was to reach the target and succeed, as he put it. Cecil sought results and success, shunned failure and had no use for “pointless talk”.

2. Focal problem and coaching goals

Cecil had been urged to resolve interpersonal conflict situations, although he did not understand why they had occurred and why the board had made such a “number of it”: at the last board meeting, the majority owner had announced that he would resign if Cecil continued as CEO. According to him, Cecil treated the employees with no respect and had dismissed the sales manager and employed his own wife in the office without consultation. The majority owner found Cecil arrogant and even incapable of treating the staff as human beings. The interpersonal conflict was strong and clear.

Cecil also needed support in clarifying his communication in order to better understand his followers, motivate them and show them he was capable of handling and resolving the interpersonal conflict situation that was preventing Company C from returning to productive daily operations.

After our first phone conversation, I listed four goals that we would seek to attain together:

1. *Resolve the interpersonal conflict situation between the majority owner and Cecil.* This involved Cecil asking the principal shareholder to meet with him and discuss their opposing positions.
2. *Develop communication between Cecil and the company employees.* This goal involved Cecil arranging regular breakfast and lunch events that everyone in the company would be welcome to join. These shared moments were meant to improve the flow of information and allow the employees to get to know each other better.
3. *Create an enthusiastic atmosphere that was conducive to work and that the employees would find rewarding.* Cecil would learn to thank and praise his followers on a daily basis for a job well done.
4. *One-to-one discussions between Cecil and management team members:* Cecil would sit down with the sales director to clarify the sales roles and objectives. Cecil would hold private meetings with everyone on the management team to apologize for any unpleasantness he had caused. All of the goals except this last one I was able to measure by interviewing the participants.

As part of this, Cecil was also to ask each member of staff what they needed from him and listen without comment to their replies, an act he had earlier considered a waste of time. One of the objectives I had set for myself as coach was to interview the entire personnel of the company and attempt to find the most effective way to describe to Cecil how destructive his behaviour was.

3. Coaching process

On August 16, 2016, I sent my coaching proposals, cost estimates and two management articles to Cecil via email. I had built my proposals on the issues we had discussed in our first meeting.

After contacting Cecil, we had a meeting where he was very clear about the problem. The majority owner had refused to work with him if he did not change his behaviour and ways of communicating. He was confused, and he did not really understand what had happened: why was the majority shareholder of the company, in particular, reacting so strongly?

During our initial sessions, I could sense that Cecil did not agree with the board's decision to hire my third-party help. He had agreed to participate because "the boss said I had to"; in other words, the chairman of the board had suggested he contact me. At our second meeting, Cecil even asked me why we were meeting. At this point I raised my voice and asked him, "Why don't you tell me why we are meeting and why I am using my time on you?" I also asked if I was there for myself or because of him and his need to change his behaviour. I was angry, and I made clear that there was no use using my time if he saw no benefit in it. He agreed. Later on, I recognized this was completely the wrong approach. First, the need for change must also come from the coachee himself, not only from a third party, in this case from the head of the board. Consequently, Cecil never fully committed to this coaching project. Second, a coach should talk in a kindly manner whenever possible; in fact, a coach should always be able to do this – no excuses. By becoming angry, I was not showing the necessary respect to Cecil as a coach. I should have been asking about his needs instead. Consequently, I made a serious mistake in relation to gaining Cecil's trust. I behaved like all the others giving him orders and not supporting him.

Nevertheless, after this incident I felt that Cecil and I had found some common ground on the reasons for my coaching, although I knew Cecil was not fully committed to the coaching. Cecil indeed began to follow my instructions, but in a mechanical way. He was not convinced of the need to change his behaviour. After this incident, he also suggested we meet somewhere outside his office, so no one would hear me raising my voice. This suited me fine, but I had the feeling my coaching would be unsuccessful; I had already lost his trust.

Cecil was of the opinion that the situation at hand was not a full-blown conflict with the majority owner but a mere difference of opinion. His version of the story was that the majority shareholder had required certain financial results, and after Cecil had attained them, the majority owner had accused him of achieving them unethically, at the expense of his employees. Cecil had understood this unethical behaviour to mean his inability to listen to his followers "go on and on about the same things all the time". He argued that if the company set such high performance goals within such a short time frame, then no time remained for him to listen to his followers better and be a "softer" leader.

According to the majority shareholder, Cecil had told Company C's sales director, whom Cecil had called "lazy and unproductive", that he would not be able to continue working at the company unless the sales targets were met. According to Cecil, he had, as CEO, expanded the operations of the start-up to the point where the time was ripe for an ambitious and demanding sales push – one that he had also worked hard to achieve. Such a sales push was also necessary in order to meet the performance goals that the board, which included the majority shareholder, had set for the company.

The company results supported Cecil's claims: to date, he had indeed reached all of its goals under his leadership. In order to take the next step and meet the ambitious targets of the board, Cecil had felt it necessary to impress upon the sales director that it was time to move past making lists and spread sheets of potential clients and concentrate on hard sales. This required getting out, meeting with as many customers as possible and clinching deals. Cecil believed that the company sales director had been unsuccessful at generating sales. It is also worth mentioning here that Cecil had dismissed the company's previous sales director.

The problems at Company C were very clear: the majority shareholder and the CEO were engaged in an interpersonal conflict, largely concerning the CEO's leadership style and treatment of others. The conflict had affected Company C in a broader sense as well. An atmosphere of despondency had settled over the employees, who no longer necessarily believed in the company's success.

At first, I set out to interview just five individuals: the four members of the management team and one representative of the plant management. After this, Cecil would present to the other employees my proposal and the conflict resolution tasks he was prepared to perform. He would also be required to tell the employees what he would do to make their work more fulfilling and stable. Finally, he was to inform the staff of how sorry he was for creating instability in the company and of his wish to develop in-house communications, his own first and foremost.

I proposed to Cecil that it would be best to adopt a humble approach and pay attention to listening to his followers, thereby proving that he was capable of a different kind of leadership. As coach, I would, in turn, discuss his efforts with the chairman of the board, whom I would ask to give Cecil the opportunity to show that he could change his leadership style. I also made clear that at least six months would be required before the interpersonal conflict could be resolved completely, time could heal memories, and Cecil could show he was capable of changing his behaviour.

On the next day, 17 August 2016, I received an email from Cecil in which he relayed the news that the company's sales director had announced he was leaving the company. I immediately suggested to Cecil that I interview the sales manager before his departure in order to "hear his side of the story", which could be of help to us in the future. More importantly, we would show the sales director that we cared about him and that he had been given the "opportunity to be heard". I hoped he would retain a good impression of

Company C and say positive things about it in his future endeavours. Cecil thought my proposal was good, but asked if we could pick things up a week later, after he had returned from a business trip.

During his trip, Cecil took immediate action to begin accomplishing the goals we had mutually agreed: On 18 August 2016, while still on this trip, he sent the company's employees an invitation to lunch in English.

Dear all,

In an attempt to improve our in-house communications and flow of information, Company C will start offering its employees a paid lunch that we attend together on select Mondays. The first lunch will take place on August 29 at noon, so please make arrangements to be there.

Everyone is welcome to join in. If X will make a note to the delivery companies, we can arrange that no shipments arrive to any of our units during this time.

XX, could you please look into whether we can book a table at XXX? If this is not possible, I'm open to suggestions about the venue. However, the idea is that we go and sit together somewhere, so we shouldn't choose a restaurant in which we would be scattered about.

Cecil

I began my work on 23 August 2016 by interviewing the four management team members and the plant director while Cecil was on the business trip. I first spoke with the majority owner, who said he had lost patience with Cecil's arbitrary leadership. He remarked that as CEO Cecil was unable to articulate clear tasks, making it impossible for the sales director to know what was expected of him. "Cecil treats the staff like a ruthless American. They'll lose faith in the future if he keeps it up," he said. By "American", the owner was referring to the US leadership style of "show results or I will show you the door".

The majority owner also felt that Cecil had created a culture of fear in the company with his unpredictable decisions and inability to communicate his wishes and goals. According to the majority shareholder, Cecil's current leadership style involved "changing tactics on a dime" and not informing anyone about the new direction he had decided to take. The owner said this had greatly affected the sales director's ability to work. The sales director had eventually reached the conclusion that he was unable even to perform his work because of Cecil's continual interfering and failure to support important tasks like updating the digitalization of customer data. The majority owner said he easily understood why the sales director had wanted to resign.

The owner claimed to be well aware of the sales figures Cecil had achieved for the good of the company but was still bothered by his unethical and demoralising leadership style. The owner had already decided that Cecil was the wrong person to act as CEO of the company, as he felt the staff was motivated by the ideological principle of a cleaner world, and should therefore be treated respectfully, listened to and talked to. The majority owner of the company considered a new CEO was needed.

Company C was in the midst of fulfilling a major deal made with an Australian company, so it was not a good time to switch CEOs, especially because Cecil had played a key role in securing the deal. Thus, another method had to be found to resolve the conflict situation. I proposed to the majority owner that we draw up a coaching plan with the goal of supporting Cecil's evolution into an executive with a more transformational leadership style. I also explained to Cecil that this evolution needed to occur in a short space of time.

I completed my five initial interviews in order to better understand the current state of Company C and the nature of the conflict that had occurred. I soon became aware that Cecil was a very dynamic and productive executive, but he was also incapable of listening to his employees and disinterested in motivating them if it meant he had to engage in conversation or show verbal support or interest in their lives. Talking about emotions or taking feelings into account was out of the question for the CEO's side. An image of a dysfunctional leader began to emerge.

Below, I present to some comments made by management team members during the interviews. As the management team included just one woman, I do not refer to them by pseudonyms, in order to protect her anonymity.

One management team member claimed to be afraid of Cecil, as the CEO was unable to communicate with others and was only able to issue commands: *"I'd rather not talk with him anymore, or if I have to, I know my day will be ruined"*. Another management team member said the enthusiasm of the staff, who shared the same values, had fallen because of Cecil's questionable behaviour and the on-going interpersonal conflicts. This same team member wanted to return to the situation prior to Cecil's arrival at the firm, when there had been more team spirit and a better drive to work together.

In addition, Cecil had hired his wife to take care of the post and run errands, without discussing this with the board. However, Cecil felt he was simply saving a desperate situation when no one else would step up to do the necessary work.

In contrast to the other employees, one interviewee felt that there was nothing unclear in his work duties or with regard to Cecil. He had recently started in his position and reported being pleased with the job description and the information that he had received. Moreover, he felt that a good communication channels existed between himself and Cecil.

When Cecil returned from his business trip, he presented a summary of the interviews I had conducted to the management team at the morning meeting. He told the team the ways in which he would be improving his

communications, and he also presented the idea of regular lunch dates, as his email had indicated. The majority owner of Company C nevertheless found Cecil's presentation at the meeting half-hearted and hard to believe. Cecil had done as instructed, but the majority owner felt that it was obvious that Cecil was insincere in his efforts. As coach, I tried to mediate the situation as best I could; explaining that the change would require time and Cecil was needed to see important transactions cross the finish line. Everyone knew the Australia deal was crucial for the company's bottom line, but by this point the majority owner was so frustrated with Cecil that he had moved beyond caring about the low motivation of the staff or the precarious finances of the company. He was certain that nothing could be done to alter Cecil's personality and his behaviour would never change. I nevertheless asked him to try and be patient and do his best to support Cecil as he embarked on this transformational process.

Cecil and I decided to hold a group discussion on 23 September 2016 in which we would sit down with the management team and the plant director. The objective was to listen to everyone's concerns, so they would be convinced that Cecil wanted them to feel good about their work and was indeed sincere in his efforts to learn better communication methods.

Cecil did not like to talk on the phone and asked if we could carry out our business via email, which transpired to be our main coaching channel. Below I present an email I sent to Cecil in order to support him in group discussions:

Good morning Cecil,

I suggest we start Thursday's group discussion with you, who will explain why this project has been set in motion. Be open about the challenges you have faced and tell the others that you acknowledge that they have faced challenges, too. Tell them what you think leadership is about, and how you think you have functioned as Company C's CEO. Say that you understand now that the choices you have made are not necessarily what is needed for the company, particularly in terms of optimal personnel development.

Say that because you are trying to be completely open, you would hope that they could do the same. Explain that the objective of the meeting is for everyone to find a common thread in order to work better together. With this in mind, you would like to hear their opinions about how you manage the company, and what they think could be done to improve workplace well-being at Company C.

Then you could hand things over to me: I will facilitate discussion of the individual team members' needs and feelings. There may be long periods of silence, as I will give people plenty of time to think; try not to be annoyed by this or things could move in an entirely different direction. Remember that our goal is to get everyone committed to your personal transformation

– you will start to manage things differently and you need their help. They can assist you by saying, for instance: “I didn’t like it when...”

No one involved – you or the others – will be able to change their attitude instantaneously. Only once this kind of honest conversation has taken hold, and your employees realise they can express their opposition without worrying about you growing angry or losing their job, can the work to create a healthier work environment and leadership culture begin. In any case, the current impression is that the workers at Company C are not happy – even though some might well be. We must try to pull together first, before we can start discussing work roles and production development. How does this sound to you?

Sincerely,

Pauliina

Cecil answered my email by confirming that it was a good plan. I also sent him several articles and excerpts from leadership articles.

Later that afternoon, however, I received a message from Cecil cancelling the group meeting, which was scheduled for the following day. He said he was in the wrong state of mind, and I was unable to contact him. I later heard from the chairman of the board that the board had met with him earlier that day, and the discussion had grown so heated that Cecil had walked out before it was over, proclaiming that he could not continue as CEO as long as the majority owner remained part of the company.

I finally got through to Cecil by phone, and we agreed to meet at his home. As we sat outside on the terrace, Cecil told me that he felt he had performed exactly as the board – the majority shareholder included – had required of him. He had achieved all the goals they had set for the company. Nevertheless, Cecil felt that the work of the sales director was insufficient to meet the forthcoming sales targets, and Cecil had therefore demanded clear evidence of an enhanced sales effort. If the primary owner felt that this was unreasonable, Cecil asked, why did he not lower these sales targets? A relaxation of the sales targets would have allowed Cecil to lead the company in a completely different manner.

His comments were all pertinent. However, I tried to explain that the majority shareholder lacked belief in Cecil’s ability to become the kind of leader who listened to his employees and remained quiet even if he was of a different opinion, in order for the employee to feel validated. By contrast, the majority owner felt that Cecil steamrolled the company staff. For instance, if Cecil disliked certain people or was unhappy with their performance, he would dismiss them. I asked Cecil what his need was, and the answer was “to be respected”.

I then proceeded to ask him if he understood that his followers required the very same from him, respect. Cecil said he understood this, but that

they needed to earn his respect through results, just as he felt he had earned respect by achieving all the goals assigned to him. Cecil's opinion on earning respect was very pragmatic: if staff members failed to act as instructed and accomplish their objectives, they did not deserve to be respected. Nonetheless, his military style had simply become too dysfunctional. I tried to make him expose himself, to show other roles than that of a "warrior", so that we could enter into a genuine discussion about his followers, thereby perhaps allowing him to understand them better. However, once again I failed:

Me: Do you ever just let yourself relax?

Cecil: No, I can barely stand to sit still.

Me: What if you started practising? You could understand others better if you took breaks from your work and enjoyed holidays.

Cecil: I'm not the kind of person that ever needed breaks.

Me: Have you always been a go-getter? Even as a child?

Cecil: Yes.

Me: Was there someone in your family that required it?

Cecil: I can't say that it was ever required, but my father couldn't stand laziness.

I interpreted this as an indication that Cecil was a person who had never been allowed to perform anything else than goal driven tasks. Acting according to orders and achieving set tasks was simply the way he had been taught to behave. To make Cecil see how other people perceived him, thereby allowing him to understand his followers, would clearly require much more time than the board was willing to offer. I was also uncertain if more time would have been sufficient; thus, it soon became clear to me that I was about to fail worse than ever before, and he would be dismissed from Company C. Nevertheless, I was reluctant to give up.

My coaching period with Cecil lasted from just 15 August 2016 to 19 November 2016, a total of three months and three days. I maintained regular contact with the chairman of the board until Cecil's contract was rewritten. Cecil's role as CEO ended, and the board offered him the possibility to work as the sales director, on a freelance basis, for a period of three months during spring 2017.

4. Coaching techniques

I had intended to present Cecil with questions designed to clarify his identity during our first meeting. Nevertheless, this felt appropriate because,

despite Cecil's calm tone of voice and body language, I could sense that he was very agitated. I usually also make a point of explaining my various coaching methods and tools during my first meeting with clients, but this time I did not. Cecil was not interested in techniques; he simply wanted me to interview his management team members and solve the interpersonal conflict situation as quickly as possible.

Regularly given positive feedback

The second time I met with Cecil, I introduced the idea of him regularly providing positive feedback and praise. Among other things, I asked him if he praised his wife and children and gave them positive feedback. When I asked him to start doing so and gave him the homework task of asking what he could do for his daughter and of praising her, he replied "Why?" I tried to explain how important it was for his daughter to hear positive things from her father. "Why?", Cecil kept asking. He explained that his daughter wanted to be alone in her room and, as father, Cecil was happy with this. If his daughter was not interested in her father's company, then "let it be", he explained. This discussion gave me the impression that Cecil lacked empathy as a father. Moreover, if he failed to understand why it was important to praise and thank his children, how could he understand how important this was to his followers?

Verbal transformation

Cecil had lived abroad and spoke relatively fluent English. Moreover, as a polite, civil person, he knew phrases such as "may I build on this?"

- 1) Using "and" instead of "but" in phrases when sharing opinions. Cecil did not find this a problem; after many years abroad, he spoke fluent English and thus found using "and" instead of "but" quite natural.
- 2) Prefacing advice or instruction with "I need you to" instead of "you should" did not work with Cecil. He was the leader; therefore, his commands were to be implemented immediately.
- 3) Learning to say "I hear what you are saying" was also too time consuming. Cecil simply lacked the time to adopt such phrases. He was nevertheless prepared to listen to and understand what others had to say if their arguments had merit. Otherwise, he was unwilling to listen. The comments of the interviewees confirmed that Cecil's approach was "if they have something relevant to say, why not listen to it?"
- 4) Responding to propositions with "may I build on this?" As a fluent English speaker, this was natural and easy for Cecil. It was part of the "language code".

I did not have the opportunity to witness conflicts occurring in Company C. However, the chairman of the board explained in detail the actions taken in the board meeting which ended with Cecil leaving the meeting. After this he had simply vanished. Significantly, no one had attempted to intervene in the interpersonal conflict situation between the majority owner and Cecil during the board meeting.

Working out

Cecil was a committed fitness enthusiast and began every morning with a run, regardless of where he was or what he was doing. He was very physically fit and could put in exceedingly long days at work. I suggested we go for shared walks instead of meeting in his office, and this suited him very well because he lived nearby could take his dog for a walk while we talked. An added bonus was that if I were to raise my voice, it would not bother anyone, as he put it.

Keeping a diary

I suggested that Cecil keep diary, but he claimed to have no time for that. Moreover, in practice, the coaching ended up being simply email remainders, as Cecil and I met only three times.

5. Outcomes

I failed as a coach with Cecil. The first goal of *resolving the conflict* that sparked the procurement of my services was not achieved in any way. The conflict ultimately resulted in Cecil losing his position as CEO. The second goal of *developing communications* between Cecil and the company employees was also unsuccessful. One company announcement and a shared lunch cannot be considered real development in this area. Our third goal of *clearing up the tense atmosphere* at Company C was also an abject failure. Things started to improve only after Cecil was dismissed, not during my coaching period. “The atmosphere is completely different. We have fun at work again”, remarked the majority shareholder when I interviewed him following Cecil’s dismissal from the company.

Even though it was clear to me that the only way to save the company from a mass senior management exodus and make it healthy again was to let the CEO go, I still saw it as a last-resort decision and a partial failure. I firmly believe, as Kotter (2012) claims in his book on life-long learning as a leader, that each of us is capable of learning more in our lives. This naturally entails a desire to develop and acknowledge one’s own pain points, but the process also benefits from someone who accompanies the executive on that journey – a person who is present by the leader’s side to motivate, direct and support them and make them more aware (Grant et al. 2009).

My duty was to support Cecil in his development, but I failed. I was unable to get sufficiently close to Cecil, one reason clearly being the lack of time.

However, my disrespectful behaviour during our first meeting also played a part in this. Nevertheless, I consider that the most crucial reason for our failure was his unwillingness to commit to his development and to being coached. Ideally, we would have reached a point where sufficient trust had developed between for us to delve into his innermost personal issues. I spoke openly about this with him during our last meeting, explaining what I saw as his greatest strengths and the areas he needed to work on. I said that I hoped he would have the courage to face his inner-self one day, so he would know better than to ask “why?” when someone suggested he reach out to a loved one and say something beautiful and encouraging.

Cecil’s approach to the resolution of interpersonal conflict situations was to ignore them completely, which Wall and Callister (1995) describe as “avoiding conflicts”. Cecil thought the dispute was a pointless waste of time. He admitted he did not even know what it was all about. He did not have the impression of being in conflict with anyone; rather he considered his problem with the majority shareholder of Company C a simple difference of opinion. His statement at the start of our sessions, “no one’s fighting here”, depicts his view of the situation well. He clearly had no tools for or understanding of how to approach or resolve the conflicts that crossed his path. Whether he would have been able to develop his understanding will never be known.

The conclusions to be drawn from this coaching process are clear: coaching cannot succeed if the coachee is unwilling to be coached. It is worthless trying to develop an individual without that person’s own assent and commitment (Goldsmith 2004). Moreover a coach needs to show respect in every situation – always.

4.4 Pauliina The Persistent Coach

I began this research from myself, by studying my own leadership styles and personality. As a leader, I have always been extremely result-oriented, and my decision-making has been very quick. These characteristics have also been evident in my coaching: I have been extremely demanding and insufficiently understanding, which has definitely caused my coachees unneeded pressure, thereby decreasing their capacity for faster decision making. Ben, for example, had referred to me as “the one who is like a pain in the ass”. Although it was a humorous expression, it made me consider my own behaviour and transformation. There was much room for change, for example not being so unconditional in encouraging my clients to find different styles of leadership. My enthusiasm for transformational leadership blinded me to the fact that it is enough to be able to implement some parts of the transformational leadership style – and that is already a victory.

Fortunately, something has changed during these three years: My understanding of the personal characteristics and leadership styles of

different leaders has increased. My frustration over decisions that cause difficulties has also eased. When coaching, I no longer attempt to push my coachees towards a certain “leadership model”, to changing their behaviour to remain within a certain leadership style, which – in the end – is an overly idealistic approach. Instead, I strive to find each person’s strengths and uniqueness and help leaders use these qualities when leading.

It is easy justify decisions in terms of benefit to the organization or the maximization of profit for the owners. That is how leaders often think, including myself. Nevertheless, real leadership involves questioning these assumptions, as Ben did. For instance, he asked me how he was to react if he happened to meet one of the people he had dismissed from work. Today, when I am coaching, I am aware of being far more supportive than critical, of being much more encouraging and understanding.

I have also learned more about forgiving myself and others. I no longer blame myself for past mistakes, which I have done many. I also received an apology to from one of my previous leaders, which made me do the very same: I contacted and met the people I knew I have hurt and apologized to them. Some still refused to talk to me, despite the fact that I had attempted to apologize many times. I also interviewed my previous followers about my leadership style when beginning this research.

When coaching, my increased understanding of the value of compassion and mercy is also evident in my behaviour: I am more understanding and supportive. Needless to say, I still hear my coachees tell me that I demand a lot, but I feel there is no more frustration from my side if they fail: failure is even necessary in order to grow, and my duty is to be there to support them and help them try again, not to blame them or become irritated. This has increased my coachees’ feelings of trust and security when working with me.

Thus far, I have been a strong advocate of transformational leadership, but now I ask myself whether anyone can even achieve such a leadership style in reality. Is it simply an ideal that should be pursued but which can never be attained? Moreover, what does it really mean to ask leaders to listen to their followers and encourage and motivate them? This will always be one of the greatest challenges in leadership. It also will be one of mine.

4.5 Cross-Case Analysis

This section is organized into two sub-sections: a more detailed cross-case analysis and then a summary of the main outcomes.

Teams led by a transformational leader, as a study by Zhang et al. (2011) clearly indicates, seldom participate in conflicts, as such leaders will generally prevent team members’ behaviour from leading to full-fledged conflicts. This is also confirmed by Lehmann-Willenbrock et al’s study (2015), which demonstrated that transformational leaders use solution-focused communication and prohibit complaining and the criticism of others. Instead, these leaders communicate visions and introduce solutions,

which these scholars found to increase positive communication within the group. This can be linked to the prevention of interpersonal conflicts or, at least, the precursors to such disputes.

At the beginning of the coaching process, none of the leaders in this research were able to perform a transformational leadership style when intervening in interpersonal conflict situations. Upon hearing negative comments about peers, both Adam and Ben should have intervened and stopped the discussion immediately. In addition, they should have focused more efficiently on solution-based discussions when leading meetings to prevent any kind of interpersonal conflicts from arising. Ben's failure to intervene in negative and critical discussions about his peers and to forbid such talk was linked to an increase in interpersonal conflict situations. If leaders avoid intervention at the inception of conflicts, these situations also become much harder to solve later.

As previously mentioned, transformational leadership includes four components, Bass's Four I's. These components are a) individualized consideration, b) intellectual stimulation, c) inspirational motivation, and d) idealized influence (Bass & Steidlmeier 1999; Bass 1985). However, Adam and Ben's ways of performing transformational leadership differed greatly.

- a) In the beginning, neither was able to consider his employees very individually; they were both very busy and lacked the time to schedule moments to talk and listen, which was what their followers actually needed. Lack of time seems to be very typical of leaders.
- b) Intellectual stimulation occurred most with Ben during face-to-face conversations; these were the moments he was able to give his full attention and praise his followers. By contrast, Adam and Cecil were more transactional: Adam praised through awarding material bonuses when an employee succeeded in sales. In turn, Cecil's style was more the passive management of expectations; he intervened only when things had already gone wrong, for example with the sales manager.
- c) Inspirational motivation was clearly the easiest for Adam: he organized workshops and client meetings, where he even sang. Moreover, he was enthusiastic about new software and digital products and inspired his team to use them. Cecil did not succeed in inspirational motivation at all, although he tried to invite everybody to a "free lunch". His primary way of leading was the performance of passive or active management by expectation. By contrast, Ben's way of inspiring was merely to hold personal discussions. In addition, Ben also allowed his staff to organize an *Oktoberfest*-style event for the whole company before the summer holidays. Furthermore, he encouraged the plant manager to take his staff out and spend an evening eating and going to the sauna.

- d) Idealized influence occurred through Ben's discussions when he sold his company's product to clients. The company's values were well-established through its product, but Ben had somehow internalized these values as well. Consequently, everybody knew he genuinely believed in the ideology of cleaner energy, and his way of acting influenced both customers and staff. Adam was also extremely committed to digital transformation – he displayed a burning passion for digitalization and had no difficulties in presenting his company's products. His enthusiasm was clear, and he inspired others by living the values he espoused. Cecil, in turn, was extremely professional when discussing his company's product, which prevented water from being contaminated. Green values were "written in every person's DNA" when they came to work for this company, including Cecil's. Nevertheless, this was the source of the largest disagreement between Cecil and his staff: they all were very value oriented people, including Cecil. However, Cecil was incapable of showing them respect.

The leaders all appeared to believe strongly in their products and proudly presented their companies. However, during this research, none of the leaders were capable of fulfilling the criteria for idealized influence completely. They simply lacked sufficient self-discipline, which also had an impact on their followers, who became frustrated and lost motivation. "Sometimes I feel like what the hell! Why should I do anything here when he is not even giving me reasonable tools", remarked a member of Adam's sales team. If leaders (in this case all three) fail to accomplish their own objectives themselves, other management team members or followers are also unlikely to complete their own tasks. Leaders will not become idealized influencers if they are incapable of tackling demanding tasks and being a role model (Bass & Riggio 2006). However, when leaders do attain the status of a role model, they can facilitate the reduction of conflicts in the workplace through their intellectual influence. For example, Adam increased his followers' respect by cleaning his email box and answering his emails within 24 hours, making clear decisions, keeping fit and exercising regularly. Moreover, after doing this, his followers felt their needs were better heard.

Full range of leadership

Leaders display either a stronger transactional or transformational style when performing leadership (Northouse 2016; Bass & Riggio 2006; Judge & Bono 2000; Avolio & Bass 1999). In addition, however, the scholars cited above also suggest that, in practice, a successful leader requires a combination of several leadership styles. This need was clearly noticeable for every leader in this research. Nevertheless, their styles were not

controlled or clearly selected – they were performed spontaneously in the moment. Thus, the leaders were not particularly aware of the names or approaches of their leadership styles or of the effects of these styles on their followers. However, they were sufficiently talented to be able to employ a range of styles, especially after receiving support.

Leaders who perform a transactional leadership can either adopt a passive management style, intervening when something is already going wrong, or an active management style, where they actively supervise their staff (Northouse 2016; Avolio 2011). All three leaders also performed a transactional leadership style, but Adam was the leader who performed the widest variety of styles. For instance, Adam performed an active management style of transactional leadership when giving material bonuses. For example, to raise interest in a new digital product, Adam might initiate a competition for who sold most and reward the winner with an evening at a spa or restaurant. The positive impact of transactional leadership was seen in sales: the more salespersons were praised materially, the higher scores they achieved. Nevertheless, Adam also performed a passive management leadership style by reacting to problems after they had already occurred (Northouse 2016; Avolio 2011). Nevertheless, the further the coaching period progressed, the more transformational aspects emerged in his work: he became better aware of his surroundings and what was going on in his team.

In turn, Ben primarily performed *laissez-faire* and transformational styles (Chaudhry & Javed 2012; Den Hartog et al. 1997). Ben did not monitor the progress of his followers' tasks, which gave the false impression that he did not care. Ben was convinced that adults, particularly those in expert roles, should take responsibility and complete their tasks without the need for supervision. Nevertheless, when there was sufficient time and task as not overly complex, Ben performed a more transformational leadership style, which confirms Dóci and Hofmans' (2015) claim that the more complex the task, the less likely a leader is to adopt a transformational leadership style.

Cecil, by contrast, performed both active and passive management styles by following and controlling his sales people. When the results displeased him, he was prepared to dismiss the person concerned. This is line with Avolio et al. (2009), who observe that transactional leaders are willing to use sanctions when followers fail to follow orders. Cecil was praised by the board for his reports and follow-ups; nonetheless, he simply did not know how to motivate his staff and lead them differently.

What also became clear was that all three of leaders had a slightly different picture of their leadership performance from that expressed by their followers: they all claimed to be far more transformational than their followers' descriptions gave cause to believe. One reason for this is probably the culture of heroic leadership (Northouse 2016), where followers' require their leaders to be able to fulfil all their needs, accomplish any task and never make mistakes.

Dysfunctional leadership

The conclusions of Xu et al. (2015) and Higgs (2009) on dysfunctional leaders, who diminish the effectiveness of their followers through their leadership style, are confirmed by the findings of this study: Cecil clearly decreased well-being and team cohesion in his organization. However, it is notable that it was not only Cecil who acted as a dysfunctional leader: on occasion Adam and Ben were also extremely dysfunctional when failing to take action and decisions or to intervene in interpersonal conflict situations.

Higgs (2009) emphasizes the challenge of removing dysfunctional leaders, as they are often very productive. This was the case also with Cecil. His board saw raising sales figures, while his followers lost their motivation to work.

Coaching techniques

The coaching techniques employed with Adam, Ben and Cecil were largely based on the kind of holistic approaches used in psychotherapy (Mackewn 1997; Barlow 1981). Such approaches seek to see individuals in their entirety rather than striving to solve one or two distinct problems. The goal is to envision coachees as a whole individuals functioning in their own environment.

Adam, who had a very clear self-image, faced no challenges in answering the six identity questions presented earlier (See the Figure 2). Adam saw his capabilities more clearly and was able to develop his personal way of approaching his followers effectively. He organized regular meetings not only with the whole team but also with himself, which was called “me time”. During this time, he had the opportunity to reflect and plan for the next steps, as Adam suffered from poor time management. These “me time” sessions were often early in the morning before the working day or late in the evening. The aim was to arrange “me time” also during the day. However, this was not accomplished during the coaching project.

Something significant occurred more than a year after our coaching project had officially finished but while we were still meeting for our power walks: when reflecting on his development, Adam remarked that he was no longer certain that he wanted to lead others. Instead, he was more interested in developing himself, as the more compassionate he became and the more he understood the diversity of the human mind, the more he understood other leaders, and the less he wanted to be someone who, in one way or another, other hurt his followers by making difficult decisions. This was a clear sign of becoming an even more transformational leader.

Ben had a clear vision of himself, but at the same time he refused to answer the question on vision. The reason was clear: he wished to avoid disappointment if the dream failed. This had an impact on Ben's behaviour at work – he avoided “painting a vision” to the whole staff in case they were unable to realize it. According to Ben, he found himself performing

a transformational style although he was unprepared to deliver any kind of vision to his staff. Nevertheless, one of the core characteristics of transformational leadership is that leaders should be able to discuss their vision in order to motivate their followers to attain superior performance (Bass & Riggio 2006). This was clearly not the case with Ben.

Ben preferred to meet his staff face to face rather than give visionary speeches, although such speeches were neither difficult nor unpleasant for him. This face-to-face manner was also used when giving positive one-to-one feedback, which is related to inspirational motivation (Bass & Riggio 2006). However, Ben's way of praising the entire staff was by means of a weekly newsletter where he wrote something positive and thanked his fellow workers. By contrast, Adam found it easy to give positive feedback both individually and also in front of the whole team, and in common meetings he stimulated his followers to challenge their own ideas and ways of performing. Adam nevertheless first began this habit after realizing himself that he gave insufficient positive feedback. Adam's new regime had a clear positive impact on his followers' performance, with praise in front of the whole group doing the most to encourage them to attain superior results through increased motivation.

Verbal transformation – using “and” instead of “but”, “I need you to do this” instead of “you should”, “I hear you” instead of “you always”, and encouraging by saying “may I build on this?” – is related to inspirational motivation (Bass & Riggio 2006). Thus, the more the leaders in this study were able to use such phrases in their communication, the more motivated their followers became. However, adopting these phrases took longer than expected. As Ben wrote in his first emails, it felt unnatural to use “I need you to” in either English or Finnish. Nevertheless he persevered, and after a year these phrases became a natural part of his conversations. This was also the case with Adam: it became a joke in meetings when Adam was talking and praising someone or something and ended up saying “but . . . I mean ‘and’”. “It felt nice when he did not say, ‘it was good, but’”, remarked a salesperson from Adam's team. Her sales scores rose every week after receiving regular praise.

Working out and keeping a diary are related to idealized influence (Bass & Riggio 2006). Adam, who was very determined to develop himself, kept a diary or notebook, followed a tough regime of physical exercise, was capable of reflecting on his own thoughts and learned to demand the same discipline from other management team members and from his key followers. We also began to have “walk and talk” sessions instead of sitting in the office. These became very effective for resolving some problematic issues: while walking, there were no other distractions, which helped Adam concentrate solely on the issues he needed to resolve.

Ben did not write a diary, although he used a little black note book at the beginning of the coaching project. However, at some point he stopped this practice. Instead, his way of reflecting on his behaviour was playing golf. The methods and means of self-reflection are myriad; therefore the form of reflection or exercise or is unimportant. Unfortunately, however, Ben was

unable to play golf sufficiently often. In turn, Cecil's reflection apparently occurred through daily sports, although we did not have occasion to discuss it. Having time to reflect seemed crucial to these leaders' ability to improve their development and leadership performance. Moreover, reflecting together during the coaching sessions became important: "I would not have made this transformation without you and the possibility to reflect with someone", summarized Adam in the final interview.

Table 4 presents all the coaching techniques used during the two years and ten months of coaching time. As can be seen, not all the coaching techniques worked with every coachee; nevertheless, this does not indicate that the coachee was unable to achieve his goals or accomplish his tasks. As a coach, it is essential to provide coachees with the opportunity to try different techniques and not to force them to employ solely those techniques that the coach finds meaningful.

Table 4. Coaching techniques and their success with the three leaders

| Coaching techniques used | Adam, Director of Marketing Services and Business | Ben, CEO | Cecil, CEO |
|---------------------------|---|---|---|
| Clarifying identity | Yes: Adam became aware of his tendency to avoiding finishing challenging and time-consuming tasks. | Yes: Ben became aware of the reasons he avoided intervening in interpersonal conflict situations. | No: Cecil had difficulties understanding why his behaviour was criticized. |
| Regular positive feedback | Yes: Adam started a practice during Monday sales meetings where each salesperson praised another for one minute. | Yes: Ben began to give positive feedback in his weekly newsletters. | No: Cecil found no reason to give positive feedback if it was not related to sales results. |
| Verbal transformation | Yes: Adam started to use "and" instead of "but", especially in his presentations. | Yes: Ben adopted these verbal techniques ("and" instead of "but", "I hear you" and "may I build on this?") and used them in his daily verbal communication. | Difficult to say: Verbal techniques such as "and" instead of "but" and "may I build on this" were not part of Cecil's vocabulary when speaking Finnish. |
| Workout | Yes: physical activity became a permanent fixture in Adam's calendar. We also included powerwalks in our coaching. | Yes and No: Ben found it too time-consuming when he was overloaded. Moreover, his back problems prevented him from becoming more physically active. He nevertheless played golf if the weather permitted. | No: Cecil did some physical exercise every day; therefore, there was no need to activate him. |
| Keeping a diary | Yes: Adam kept a diary or tape recorded or videoed his thoughts and reflections. It helped him prioritize innovative ideas and keep of track on daily routines. | Yes: Ben wrote in his "black note book", and emails. | No: We did not have time to accomplish this task. |
| Leader's personality | 1.neuroticism: occasionally 2.extroversion: yes 3.openness: yes 4.agreeableness: yes 5.conscientiousness: occasionally | 1.neuroticism: occasionally 2.extroversion: occasionally yes, occasionally no 3.openness: yes 4.agreeableness: yes 5.conscientiousness: occasionally | 1.neuroticism: difficult to say 2.extroversion: Cecil was very fact oriented and spoke when needed. 3.openness: no, Cecil did not find it important to be open. |

Three Stories of Leaders and Their Coach

| | | | |
|------------------|--|--|---|
| | | | 4.agreeableness: no, Cecil had difficulties to fully understand the causes of conflict. 5.conscientiousness: yes |
| Leadership style | Transformational and transactional, occasionally laissez-faire | Transformational and laissez-faire | Transactional: active and passive management by expectations |
| Goals | Improving and clarifying communications skills, including learning techniques to intervene to resolve interpersonal conflicts. | Improving and clarifying communications skills, including learning techniques to intervene to resolve interpersonal conflicts. | Learning techniques to resolve interpersonal conflicts. |
| Results | Improved communication skills, and self-development, slight improvement in time management, and team motivation, ability to intervene in conflict situations almost one year after the coaching had started. | Improved communication skills, and self-development, very clear improvement in management team motivation and meeting structure, ability to intervene in conflict situations after the one-year coaching period. | No improvement in communication nor in resolving interpersonal conflicts. |

Coaching

Goldsmith (2009) and Feldman and Lankau (2005) claim coaching has a positive effect on executive behaviour even over a shorter 10-week period. These authors observe that executive coaching can affect the positive transformation of the executive's leadership role, the ability of the executive to control his or her actions, and development of the executive's self-awareness.

Adam's behaviour began to change after six months: he decided to give more time to his followers and he started to organize his mailbox, answering emails and making decisions faster. However, the main change related to resolving interpersonal conflicts first occurred after our coaching period was over. This happened in January 2016, when Adam called me to discuss an interpersonal conflict with a member of the management team. Adam had taken the initiative and approached the person and apologized.

It took over a year for Ben to start to react to interpersonal conflict situations. He became more self-confident and he learned to use phrases like "I hear you", "what is your need?" and "I need you to". At the beginning of the process, he already enhanced his communication by introducing a weekly newsletter from the CEO. Nevertheless, contrary to Goldsmith's (2009) claims, transformation was not possible in 10 weeks, as much more time is required for a permanent, internalized change in behaviour.

Perhaps for this reason, Cecil was unable to show such development. Although he dutifully followed my instructions and even invited the entire staff to lunch in order to improve the atmosphere at work and his own behaviour, three months was too short a time for any meaningful transformation to occur.

In order to measure the performance, impact and success of coaching, Gregory et al. (2011) introduce a *control theory framework*. The framework

aims to set common objectives and provide feedback, while the control theory itself asks leaders to monitor and reflect on their own performance by also asking their followers for feedback. Adam did this at least once during the coaching period. Upon receiving feedback that he spent insufficient time supporting and listening to his team, he decided to take action, clearing his calendar to make more time for his employees. It was not to last, however, as the time he had scheduled for being more present for his team was soon overtaken by tasks required by the senior management team.

Ben, in turn, was brave enough to show the feedback gathered from the interviews in front of the whole company by arranging an event where the negative results of the interviews were discussed. This was clearly a sign of willingness to develop a more transformational leadership style. He also received much positive feedback by doing so.

Leaders and personality characteristics

Wall and Callister's (1995, p. 519) study indicates how "personality characteristics can generate conflict". This was the case with all of the leaders in the present study. Adam's tendency to please everybody, which had an impact on his capacity for making decisions and led to his leaving matters unresolved, irritated some of his sales team and increased tensions within the group. For example, Adam was inclined to answer one person's question before another's, although the latter had posed that question weeks before the former. Ben's tendency to leave unpleasant and difficult tasks unresolved caused clear conflicts, as management team members began to act without authorization. For example, one such incident occurred when Ben was unable to make a decision on ordering some materials, as a result of which a management team member ordered the materials himself, thereby stepping on the toes of the purchasing manager. Soon after this incident, the management team member and the purchasing manager found themselves in an interpersonal conflict situation. By contrast, Cecil's unempathetic way of treating his followers caused no interpersonal conflicts between his followers; on the contrary, it strengthened team members' resolve to maintain a united front against him. Therefore, Cecil's behaviour simply reduced their motivation to work.

Leaders should possess a clear and realistic understanding of their own characteristics and how those traits influence other people. It became clear in the interviews that the more leaders are capable of identifying their behaviour and communicating it (their manners, way of thinking and way of performing as a leader), the less they will generate conflicts.

1. Neuroticism. According to Bass (1990), neuroticism plays no part in transformational leadership. During this research, however, all of the leaders conformed, on occasion to Judge and Bono's (2000) definition of a neurotic leader as person who is depressed, vulnerable, and loses faith in himself. Despite the fact that all the leaders were occasionally delusional, lost their enthusiasm for work and expressed some neurotic feelings, neuroticism

was neither a permanent characteristic nor an obstacle to their being transformational. Rather, these were transient moments, such as when they received negative financial news. All three leaders had moments when they lost enthusiasm for work. Adam felt that although he tried his best, it was never enough. For example, when Adam resolved show he was listening to the needs of his followers by recruiting extra help for his salespeople, another follower became offended because she felt that she had not been taken into account. Thus, Adam once remarked that “when I’m bowing to someone, without doubt I’m sticking out my behind to someone else”.

When Ben’s workload became too challenging, he also experienced a loss of enthusiasm. Even after board meetings, Ben sometimes felt depressed. “I will take this evening off although I know I should finalize the offer. I simply need to be able to breathe after the board meeting and pull myself together again”, Ben explained. The pressure to be successful and efficient and achieve good financial results was extremely demanding for all of these leaders. For example, Cecil stood up in the middle of a board meeting, literally announced he was leaving everything and then walked out of the room. This was an expression of vulnerability; Cecil had become hurt and lost his enthusiasm and faith.

2. Extroversion. Adam and Ben were both outgoing, positive and energetic leaders in social interaction, Adam even more so than Ben. By contrast, Cecil displayed none of these traits. Ben used his extroversion for meeting and charming investors. It was easy for him to approach his followers, which he began to do even more after starting the coaching process. He even moved away from his closed office space to sit among his team members. This change was happily received, as Ben’s extrovert behaviour provided an injection of energy into an otherwise silent environment. He was, as one management team member described him, “sufficiently extrovert, while not talking too much”.

Adam’s way of being extrovert attracted both clients and partners, who with pleasure joined different events where Adam was present. Both Ben and Adam had easier access to their followers when acting openly. Conversely, Cecil’s followers did not quite know what to talk about or how to approach him, as Cecil saw no need to “waste words”.

3. Openness. Leaders are not necessarily open despite being creative and curious (Judge & Bono 2000). Leaders’ openness is related to the ability to share their own needs and feelings (Judge & Bono 2000). Despite being coached in this process, the leaders in this study were not yet capable of openness without help. Consequently, I assisted Ben in the organization of a value workshop for the management team. However, it was only after CFO told the participants about his serious illness, how it had influenced his values and how he was attempting to live in the present because of that experience that the other members also dared to share more about themselves than simply their hobbies. This also encouraged Ben to reveal more about himself and his fears and experiences. For example, he explained how difficult it was for him to dismiss an employee because he related so

strongly to that person's situation. This helped the management team members understand Ben's difficulties in making decisions. Describing his fears also made the management team members more supportive of him: "I understand much better now why he acts as he does. I almost feel pity for him being in his position", remarked one of the management team members when I was interviewing him.

Leaders often ask if they are allowed to show their feelings. Adam and Ben tended to consider it inappropriate for a leader to display negative emotions such as anger or disappointment. However, the more these leaders bravely opened up by revealing details about themselves, the easier it was for their followers to commit to their tasks. In Finland, there is a tendency to avoid bringing one's home life to work and talking about private matters. However, talking about "domestic issues" in management team meetings actually made the management team members more committed to their work. "It is easier now to understand why somebody has to leave something uncompleted, and instead of being irritated I can start to help this person", observed one management team member in the final interview when I enquired into his experiences of talking more about private matters in management team meetings.

4. Agreeableness. This feature corresponds with empathic talent (Bass 1985) and was noticed in Adam and Ben. Leaders must be able to feel empathy in order to understand and motivate their followers. This was not the case with Cecil, who felt no empathy towards his followers. In his view, if followers failed to reach a goal, they no longer had the right to continue in their current position. This lack of empathy increased fear in Cecil's followers, and their motivation to work decreased.

Ben, by contrast, was extremely empathic. However, Ben's ability to be agreeable was sometimes too pronounced, which once led him into a situation where it was almost impossible to dismiss an employee, even though it was necessary both for this person himself and also for the success of the business and the entire company. Ben had imagined himself in this person's position and was simply incapable of letting him go.

Adam also displayed the ability to be empathetic. It was easy for him to share in the happiness when someone succeeded; he wanted to celebrate that person's victory immediately in front of everybody. This clearly inspired his team members and made them want to achieve their goals better. Ben was also very empathetic when personal problems occurred and was willing to understand and support – provided he noticed the situation. However, as previously mentioned, his capacity for being emphatic was sometimes excessive, as it prevented him from making unpleasant decisions. A further example of this was his inability to make all his followers use some new client software, which caused difficulties in estimating the company's sales, as some figures were missing.

5. Conscientiousness. Leaders should be well organized and systematic (Judge & Bono 2000), and if they are not, they should employ an assistant to arrange their timetables and ensure that the "paperwork" is in order. Only

Cecil was well organized, his paperwork was always complete, all the figures were correct and he never needed to be asked for payment receipts, which he invariably delivered on time to the accounting firm.

This was certainly not the case with Adam and Ben, and their disorganized habits caused problems regarding time and resourcing. Adam had no time to clean his table, go through his payment bills or do any kind of paper work. His email box was an enormous mess, and his followers became irritated when he failed to answer his emails on time. This resulted in them believing that Adam was lazy, which he was not. Giving this kind of impression thus negatively affected Adam's ability to gain trust.

To help rectify matters, we even organized a cleaning day for the whole office of Company A. Clients who came in through the main entrance were able to see Adam's team's open office and its tables directly. The sight was disconcerting: when interviewing some clients, they told me the disorderly office influenced their beliefs about how Adam's team was using their money, leading them to question whether Company A was treating it "in the same messy way". After this, I asked Adam to organize a cleaning day immediately. All but one employee complied. This person was unwilling to follow any instructions whatsoever. Nevertheless, she was not exempt from the task, and so I asked Adam to impress on her the importance of respecting the team and the clients. Adam tried, but she demurred and Adam gave up. It was too time consuming and unpleasant. Consequently, I assumed responsibility – which was wrong. This person finally cleared her desk, and thus a feeling of unfairness within the team was successfully avoided. However, I had made a mistake by assuming responsibility for a task that did not belong to me, which decreased Adam's authority as a leader in front of this person. When interviewing this team member after the coaching period was over, she remarked that she preferred to follow my instructions and examples over Adam's.

Ben was better at organizing his paperwork than Adam. However, getting Ben to answer an email could take several months if Ben considered the issue time consuming, difficult or simply too unpleasant. This also was interpreted as laziness by his followers. While being organized is often underestimated among leaders, this study proved it to be a rather influential aspect of leadership. If, for example, leaders can be conscientious about their surroundings, this will support their image as caring and systematic among their followers. However, the characteristic of conscientious alone is insufficient for a leader to become transformational.

6. Interpersonal conflicts

In this research, Adam and Ben both avoided intervening in interpersonal conflicts. Adam failed even to realize when a conflict had occurred, whereas Ben either withdrew from the situation or decided not to attempt to intervene. In turn, Cecil denied the existence of interpersonal conflicts completely; he considered them merely differentiated opinions. These conflict management strategies conform to some of the approaches adapted from Van De Vliert and Kabanoff (1990), who present five styles of conflict

management (based on Blake & Mouton's grid 1964; 1970) (as stated earlier in section 2.2.4 Role of leadership in conflict management). These are: 1. Avoiding, 2. Accommodating, 3. Compromising, 4. Competing, and 5. Collaborating.

However, Adam and Ben were able to develop their behaviour during the coaching process. The major change – according to Ben – was the positive change in his self-esteem, which, after 15 months of coaching, clearly enabled him to intervene in and resolve conflict situations. Ben started prevent conflicts to occur by clarifying the roles, enhancing his communication and intervening in the conflict situations. These approaches are in line with Wall and Callister's (1995, p. 549) conflict management approach "Do not allow a conflict to build, a conflict avoided from the beginning is better than a conflict managed, and it is pivotal to remember the importance of showing that both parties have been heard, that both parties' opinions have been taken into consideration".

The reasons why leaders fail to intervene and resolve interpersonal conflicts have rarely been studied. However, this study clearly indicated that this behaviour is rooted in weak self-esteem and fear: fear of failing, being disliked and fear of hurting another person. In order to perform a transformational leadership style, a leader should thus have high self-esteem and a high level of self-awareness. The behaviour of Adam, Ben and Cecil in interpersonal conflict situations was far from how transformational leadership should be (Bass 1990; 1999). The study also confirmed the findings of Dóci and Hofmans (2015) that complex tasks are related to a decrease in transformational leadership styles. Nevertheless, what leaders consider complex varies and is very individual: For Ben tasks become complex when he – for instance – needed to understand specification of some countries law, which required time. Adam found tasks complex when there were simply too many tasks to complete and not enough time.

Although, at the beginning of the coaching process, the leaders did not recognize interpersonal conflicts as the most crucial point in their transformation, this was, conversely, very clear to me. Initially, the leaders tended to reframe what were actually interpersonal conflicts as "communication problems", "challenges in transformation", "lack of strategic thinking", "decreased sales" and "problems in the organization culture". Nevertheless, the reasons for failed transformation, lack of communication and under-motivated staff were interpersonal conflicts. Thus, it is crucial for leaders to learn how to recognize, intervene in and resolve interpersonal conflicts (Saeed et al. 2014; Zhang et al. 2011). During the past eight years of my coaching career, 90 per cent of requests have concerned intervening in interpersonal conflict situations, while the remaining 10 percent have been related to improving presentation skills, time management, and career development.

5. Discussion and Conclusions

5.1 Research Aim

The research gap identified in this study was expressed with the following main research question: How do leaders negotiate and act upon the implications of transformational leadership-based coaching and its potential for resolving interpersonal conflicts? Before describing the issues raised by this in more depth, the concise answer to this question is that successful leaders employ the insights provided by such coaching to reflect on the thoughts and feelings of the parties to a conflict and place themselves in the disputants' position. Leaders then use the increased self-esteem gained from transformational leadership-based coaching to intervene in and solve the interpersonal conflict situation. Leaders do become much more transformational after learning to reflect on their behaviour and to place themselves in another person's position. Leaders also begin to behave more like transformational leaders after receiving support and practice. As Bass writes (1990, p. 25), "transformational leadership should be encouraged, for it can make a big difference in the firm's performance at all levels".

The two other sub-questions posed by this study were as follows:

- 1a.** How do leaders orient themselves in the face of interpersonal conflicts? How do they negotiate engagement and avoidance?
- 1b.** How can leaders' orientations in resolving interpersonal conflicts be supported through coaching?

The initial conclusions from the study's findings and literature review are that prior to coaching leaders' orient themselves in the face of interpersonal conflicts by avoiding and neglecting them, not only because they find these situations unpleasant, but also because they are unaware of how to act or how to approach the interpersonal conflict situation. However, after receiving support and concrete techniques for managing these situations, this avoidance is replaced by an increased willingness and ability to intervene in and begin to resolve interpersonal conflicts.

The second conclusion is that coaching can support leaders' orientations in resolving interpersonal conflicts by offering a space for discussion and providing regular support. Such support includes the coach reflecting on behaviour and leadership tasks together with the coachee, offering concrete examples of communication (i.e. the kind of words to be used), showing how to approach the parties to a conflict (including verbal approach and body language), and rehearsing interpersonal conflict situations beforehand by making the coachee also play the roles of the disputants. Coaching can indeed be a powerful and effective method for teaching leaders to intervene in and resolve interpersonal conflicts.

A third conclusion that can be drawn from the study is that leadership, both today and in the future, requires other types of skills than simply budgeting, planning strategies and creating visions. Instead, leaders should be able to tackle ever-changing, challenging environments and lead their followers individually despite the industry. The latter requires a deep understanding of human behaviour. In order to understand their followers better and hear their needs, leaders require profound understanding of their own identity and inner-self and strong awareness of their own fears and capabilities, and, above all, the courage to intervene in interpersonal conflict situations, which will occur with ever-greater frequency in the workplaces of the future. Moreover, these leaders must be capable of bringing together different individuals with distinct skills and supporting them in diverse operating environments to create an efficient, functional and meaningful work environment where their well-being has been taken into the consideration. Only then will their followers be able to reach individual and collective goals in the organization with maximum efficiency. In order to fulfil these requirements, leaders need education, support for their own transformation and the willingness to develop themselves.

5.2 Theoretical Contributions

This study contributes to the literature on leadership, coaching, and interpersonal conflicts in various contexts. They are presented below in the same order as in figure 1 in Chapter 2.4 Research Framework.

Transformational leadership and the leader

The main contribution of this study is its assertion that becoming a transformational leader requires time, a desire to evolve, empathy and an understanding of both emotions and psychology. Leaders are rarely fully transformational; rather, the idea of a transformational leader is an ideal or a quest. However, this does not diminish the value of striving for this goal. While there are few perfectly transformational leaders, transformational leadership styles, performed according to the leader's individual personality, can nevertheless be developed and taught, as Kets De Vries and Korotov (2007),

and Bass (1990) claim. What is more, the transformational leadership style is not the only leadership style that guarantees professional interpersonal conflict resolution skills, although leaders who primarily perform transformational leadership styles are – according to Bass and Riggio (2006) – the most effective interpersonal conflict resolvers. Rather, other leadership styles, such as the charismatic and transactional leadership styles, can also enhance leaders' conflict resolution skills, as was presented when introducing the Full Range Leadership Model (Northouse 2016; Avolio 2011; Bass & Riggio 2006). Leaders performing these leadership styles can be successful in resolving interpersonal conflicts if they can meet the emotional needs of their followers, and this dovetails with Bass's finding that "transformational leaders vary widely in their personal styles" (Bass 1990, p. 23). Therefore, personality should be taken into account when recruiting leaders.

Coaching and being a coach

A further contribution of this study is that no quick fixes exist for changing one's behaviour or transforming personal development. Coaching is bi-directional – both the coachee and the coach change their behaviour, learn and develop – and internalization takes time. Moreover, internalization requires interaction when a new way of behaving has been adopted between oneself and others (Kets De Vries & Korotov 2007). To achieve real change, far more than ten weeks are required (cf. Goldsmith 2009). Furthermore, in order to learn and transform, the relationship between the coachee and the coach is critical for success: as Nelson and Hogan (2009, p. 14) write, "the coach must create an atmosphere of trust so that the executive can risk being honest about his or her concerns, perceptions of others in the organization, and expectations for coaching itself".

This atmosphere also needed to be created with my coachees, and it required time – less with Adam, with whom I was already acquainted, but an entire year with Ben. While Feldman and Lankau (2005, p. 832) write that "executive coaching does not require the development of close, personal bonds; interactions between coaches and executives tend to be more formal", I argue that real, lasting change demands deep trust, and the relationship should not be formal but close, respectful and genuine.

In addition, another contribution made by this study is the insights it provides into how coaching techniques can lead to an improvement in communication. To date, too few studies have described the importance of choosing the right words and expressions when resolving interpersonal conflicts. Lehmann-Willenbrock et al. (2015, p. 64) claim that leaders who perform a transformational style by communicating in a solutions-based way, i.e. preventing their followers from digressing when having meetings and from blaming each other, reduce the occurrence of interpersonal conflicts: "Moreover, at the micro-level of conversational dynamics within the meeting process, lag sequential analysis revealed that leaders' ideas and solutions triggered subsequent solution statements by team members and inhibited

counterproductive communication by team members, such as running off topic, criticizing, or complaining”. Nonetheless, how should this be done and what does solution-based communication mean? As a contribution to extant theory, I propose that the use of verbal communication like “I have a need”, “may I build on this?”, and “I hear what you are saying” is part of the kind of solution-based communication which would help leaders prevent the occurrence of interpersonal conflicts. This style of communication should be taught, along with a precise “verbal tool kit” including expressions for how to approach and intervene in interpersonal conflict situations. I suggest that every leader would benefit from such instruction.

Leaders and their personality

Third main contribution of this study is its claim that leaders’ personalities should be described in broader terms than simply Judge and Bono’s (2000) Big Five personality traits: 1. neuroticism, 2. extroversion, 3. openness, 4. agreeableness and 5. conscientiousness. Moreover, I suggest that personality descriptions should also include categories such as fearfulness, which is something every leader feels without being neurotic, eagerness, which can be performed by a person who is more introvert than extrovert but who still is motivated to perform or research or participate, and bravery, which supports openness, as not everyone who is open is brave enough to intervene in challenging situations. Moreover, I would also include emotionalism, which refers to the capacity to place oneself in another’s position. This involves internalizing how the other person might feel, not only being agreeable. Finally I would add sincerity, which signifies a genuine desire for the good of the others rather than mere conscientiousness.

Resolving interpersonal conflicts

The last contribution of the study is the observation that as none of the three leaders were capable of preventing interpersonal conflicts from occurring (Coleman et al. 2014), what is more important is a focus on how to approach already extant conflicts and prevent them from escalating. As Wall and Callister (1995) also observe, conflicts should never be allowed to be build, as they will exert a lasting and predominantly negative impact on the atmosphere in the workplace. The contribution of this study is that as interpersonal conflicts will arise despite the leader’s awareness and actions, it is pivotal for leaders to develop the ability to use various methods, such as apologizing, using verbal approach like “I hear you”, asking “what is your need” in order to decrease the defensive reactions of the other party, and develop leader’s self-esteem.

5.3 Managerial Contributions

The main contribution of this research to practice is the improved understanding of leadership challenges that it offers, especially in the context of resolving interpersonal conflicts. Leaders face interpersonal conflicts every day, and they should possess prior knowledge of how to intervene in and resolve them in order to prevent the occurrence of interpersonal conflicts, as such conflicts will paralyze employees and decrease goodwill and mutual understanding (De Dreu & Weingart 2003; Jehn 1995). It seems justified to suggest that recognizing, intervening in and resolving interpersonal conflicts should be part of a leader's leadership education and practised in forehand before leadership performance. Moreover, the ability to intervene and communicate in conflict situations should already be taught in early childhood. This study emphasizes that learning takes time; therefore, short seminars and quick coaching periods may not be the most effective methods for achieving results. Instead, leadership education should recognize conflict resolution as one of the core capabilities of the leaders of the future and make courses on interpersonal conflict management an integral part of leadership education, following the example of INSEAD (Kets De Vries & Korotov 2007). These lessons should be also followed in order to support leaders to internalize new learning of behaviour. This is in line with the findings of Kets De Vries and Korotov (2007), who suggest that leadership education should include "the three triangle framework" – naming mental life, conflicts and relationships – which should be followed to ensure the change will last.

The other contributions to practice made by the study can be investigated through its first sub-questions: How do leaders orient themselves in the face of interpersonal conflicts? How do they negotiate engagement and avoidance?

Leaders of the future will require the skills to better understand human behaviour and psychology, including their own. Leaders should be clearly aware of their own inner-self and identity in order to develop the self-esteem and self-awareness necessary to orient themselves in the face of interpersonal conflicts. To develop these qualities, leaders require peer support, a coach, a professional therapist, or a counsellor to guide them further and help them reflect on their own actions and behaviour from different life perspectives (Kets De Vries & Korotov 2007). In my view, when recruiting an executive leader, that leader should be authorized to enlist a peer counsellor, coach or adviser to provide support in every day working life and to educate the leader to better understand herself and others. Moreover, the recruitment process should also take into account how well candidates are aware of their own personality and strengths. This study offers a tool (identity questions) for investigating leaders' understanding of themselves and others when recruiting.

A further contribution to practice can also be investigated through the second sub-question: How could leaders' orientations in resolving

interpersonal conflicts be supported through learning? Here, the study offers several coaching techniques, including verbal rehearsals, reflection methods and physical training.

The leaders in this study avoided, neglected or failed to recognize interpersonal conflict situations. This was not only because of their personal characteristics but also because they lacked knowledge on how to approach interpersonal conflict situations.

In order to support the coachee to gain the desired results, various methods and techniques should be taken into consideration by the coach. For instance, leaders can be helped to recognize conflicts, develop the courage to intervene and know what to say and how to act through the use of verbal rehearsals and various reflection methods, such as keeping diary, recording their own talks and making videos of their performance. There is no panacea for all these requirements, but most often leaders lack sufficient concrete tools and methods to approach interpersonal conflict situations. They simply do not know what to do or say; therefore, leaders should be supported and educated in how to communicate, including the use of certain verbal habits and expressions. Furthermore, coaches themselves should continually update their knowledge and educate themselves. Finally, it is essential that coaches transform themselves by the same methods that they teach their coachees, in order to maintain their professional credibility.

As previously mentioned, a key contribution of this study is the insight that there is no such thing as a transformational leader; rather, there are transformational leadership styles, which are performed. In addition, I posit that leaders should not aim for a single, uniform type of leadership; instead, several styles are appropriate, depending on a leader's individual personality, the organization, the culture and circumstances. The study underlines the importance of investigating leaders' personal characteristics and their ability to perform several leadership styles when, for example, recruiting. Technical expertise does not necessarily equate with the capacity to lead people.

5.4 Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

The aim of this study was to produce wide, enriching and profound insights into leadership, leaders' behaviour in interpersonal conflict situations, and how to resolve such situations. The intention was to demonstrate the complex reasons behind leaders' inability to intervene in interpersonal conflict situations and to show how intervening and resolving conflicts can be taught. It is my sincere hope that my coaching techniques will be widely adopted by coaches and also that the insights offered by this study will improve leaders' ability to deepen their understanding of their leadership styles and the benefits of choosing the right style for the right situation.

Nevertheless, the aim was not to discover an “absolute truth” but to describe three leaders’ behaviour and personal characteristics when resolving interpersonal conflicts; this was done through an extremely subjective lens, and therefore this research is not impartial. The aim of an action researcher is to become part of the group – a peer member of the team which is observed. When this occurs, the researcher partially loses the ability act as an objective observer, and consequently some nuances may be missed. For example, as peer members, researchers may become so used to the behaviour under observation that they no longer question its causes or whether it could be influenced.

This question of objectivity has been omnipresent; for instance, I have also considered how much my own background has influenced my interpretations. However, by describing my background and my own transformation during these three years, I have attempted to be as open as possible in order to deepen understanding of the lens through which I have observed this process. Nonetheless, my work as a coach could also have been investigated by a third party, an outsider observing my style of coaching and giving me feedback. Although I asked for regular feedback from the interviewees, including management team members and leaders, this feedback would perhaps have been more genuine or reliable if it had been given to an outsider.

I have attempted to be extremely process orientated; however, this was not always possible because of changing situations and the unpredictable behaviour of human beings. Consequently, I have included interviews with other team members in addition to my three coachees. I have always attempted to describe our discussions as precisely as possible. Nevertheless, I was unable to videotape or record most of the conversations – and sometimes hours passed before I was able to write down what had been discussed.

The research gaps identified in this study relate to the dearth of research on concrete techniques that leaders performing transformational style can use to resolve interpersonal conflicts. By contrast, some research indeed indicates that transformational leadership is the most effective way to resolve interpersonal conflicts (Doucet et al. 2009; Bass & Riggio 2006). However, according to Peltier (2001), such studies have mainly been conducted in the context of North-American professional sports. Moreover, the literature on business coaching is almost completely silent on how transformational coaching works for senior management. While a vast body of literature exists on business coaching in general, research on transformational coaching and coaching to resolve interpersonal conflicts is sparse or close to non-existent.

My study contributes to this research field by investigating how to coach a leader to learn to resolve interpersonal conflicts more efficiently in a more transformational way. In other words, it describes techniques for supporting leaders to learn and complete their personal development tasks. In this study, I highlight how a leader can be supported by transformational coaching to resolve and address interpersonal conflict situations that leaders generally

seem to avoid. Interpersonal conflict situations are tedious, time-consuming and, above all, cause feelings of unpleasantness, which is why leaders are reluctant to address them. Leaders fear unpleasant situations if they are unaware of how to act.

This study presents just three leaders' ways of resolving interpersonal conflicts. Therefore, the findings cannot necessarily be generalized to all leaders. Moreover, the results should not be interpreted as suggesting that interpersonal conflicts only occur in companies of a certain size or in certain sectors. Subsequent studies should thus include completely different sectors and sizes of company.

A further limitation of this study is that it fails to address the role of gender in conflict resolution. However, as transformational leadership has been found to be one of the most effective styles for interpersonal conflict management (Bass & Riggio 2006) and, according to Bass and Riggio (2006), women leaders are more transformational than men, one might speculate that female leaders are better at resolving interpersonal conflicts than their male counterparts. As the role of gender in intervening and resolving interpersonal conflicts was beyond the scope of this study, and because previous studies on the differences between how men and female leaders resolve interpersonal conflicts could not be found, this could prove a fruitful area for future research. Nevertheless, if gender-explicit studies are conducted, non-binary individuals should also be taken into the consideration. My own future research will focus on the aforementioned topics related to gender and resolving interpersonal conflicts.

Epilogue

While writing the conclusions of this study, I have noticed the severity of the mistakes I made with my coachees when coaching them: I was arrogant with Cecil, I exceeded my role with Adam when doing his job, and I could not always hear Ben when trying to speed up his change without respecting his needs. I noticed some of these mistakes at the time, and I was able to apologize and ask for forgiveness, which I received. Nevertheless, I was blinded to some of my mistakes by my own idealism; I saw no other leadership style than transformational leadership, which I thought was the one and only way.

Clemency, leniency, and forgiveness are the greatest lessons of these three years. Despite the mistakes I made and despite my lack of understanding when performing as a coach, my coachees have been able to forgive me and have even sought to continue working with me. They would have had the opportunity to terminate our contract at any time, but two out of three wished to continue working with me after the coaching contract had ended. I am eternally grateful to all three of them.

This research process has given me humility: the humility to understand even deeper the often unacknowledged challenges leaders face. Leaders really are left alone to cope with the tasks and requirements of their

positions; no one is there to support or help. Ultimately, leaders bear the sole responsibility for decision-making. I have always found it difficult to see behind a leader's indecision and hesitation regarding the significant decisions required during the coaching period. Nevertheless, during this research, I became more understanding and more respectful: I now have a better appreciation of not only the diversity of leadership styles but also the ways of performing those styles. There is no "one way" to perform; there are as many ways as there are different types of leaders. Aiming to perform better and the willingness to be more aware of one's own strengths and weaknesses are already a sign of being more as a transformational leader.

During these three years I have experienced a growing acceptance of the fact that all leaders make mistakes, despite their best attentions. It is impossible always to know how one's behaviour will be interpreted by one's followers, but it is easy to blame leaders for not making decisions or not intervening in interpersonal conflict situations. I hope this research provides food for thought on leadership, especially to followers and board members.

Being a leader does not decrease one's capability to feel and show emotions. Moreover, being a leader increases the awareness of how strongly one can influence one's followers' lives, both positively and negatively. Every follower is unique, and thus being a leader who can intervene and resolve interpersonal conflicts requires psychological understanding, leadership experience, and time. These qualities are often lacking because of the demands placed upon leaders to complete reports and plan ever-changing strategies, which those of us who are not in their position rarely understand. Above all, however, education in emotional intelligence is required.

Nothing in leadership should be self-evident except the willingness to treat followers and colleagues with respect. The fact that I forgot this key rule with Cecil proves to me that much work is still required with my own transformation. Transformation is a goal one aims for throughout one's life but never really attains. In addition, by being able to develop myself together with Adam, Ben and Cecil, I have learned acceptance, including acceptance of my own mistakes during this process. Therefore, without doubt, the most valuable change during this process has been an increase in the compassion of my activities and a growth in my understanding. Consequently, it is worth asking oneself whether it is possible to meet with respect and charity, and to forgive, those who have inflicted hurt. This has been my most precious lesson.

Here, I would like to quote one of my coachees, for whom I have the utmost respect:

"When I make decisions, I always wonder if the interest of the human being is being addressed."

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Interpersonal conflicts occur everywhere, in every organization, every day. And these conflicts can only increase with the transformation of business models, mergers and acquisitions, organizational turnarounds, and digitalization and robotics. All leaders will need to be equipped to deal with these conflicts, but this is not easy. It requires a great deal of self-development and a willingness to change and even transform as a leader and a person.

This dissertation investigates how leaders orient themselves when they encounter interpersonal conflicts and asks how they negotiate engagement and avoidance when called upon to resolve and manage such conflicts. It is drawn from a study carried out using action research to observe the development of three different leaders over different periods of time. In particular, it explores how leaders can be supported in their self-development and learning on conflict management through coaching, using the underlying concept of transformational leadership.

Based on the research findings, the study argues that transformational leadership as a concept is an unattainable goal for most leaders. But it is an important ideal, and the style of transformational leadership can be taught and learned. Adopting transformational leadership styles and striving for the ideal will not only greatly benefit the individuals involved in conflict situations, it will also benefit their organizations and the overall wellbeing of the people in them.

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